MAHABHARATA



KAMALA SUBRAMANIAM

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY-7

THE BOOK AND ITS AUTHOR

SMT. KAMALA SUBRAMANIAM was born on October 4, 1916 in Bangalore. Her father was the eminent Kannada poet and dramatist, Shri T.P. Kailasam. She studied under the distinguished scholar Prof. B.M. Srikantiah. She read avidly both classics and modern thrillers and her knowledge of English literature, especially of Shakespeare, was profound. She also loved philosophy and knew her Bible as well as she knew the Gita.

In 1937, Smt. Kamala married Dr. V.S. Subramaniam, a renowned E.N.T. Surgeon of Madras. In spite of her family concerns, she pursued her literary interests and wrote a series of imaginary conversations on the model of Landor's for *Triveni* under the pen-name "Ketaki".

Her love of literature, nursed over the years, expressed itself in her developing a fascination for the Epics and Puranas of India.

In the late 60s Smt. Kamala underwent an operation for cancer, which gave her a ten-year lease of life. Lesser mortals would have been unnerved by this but for Smt. Kamala it came as a challenge and this period turned out to be the most productive literary period of her life.

Her first labour of love was the retelling of the *Mahabharata*. In this masterly condensation, of India's

(Continued on second flap)

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KAMALA SUBRAMANIAM

WITH A FOREWORD
By
K. M. MUNSHI

1989

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN
KULPATI MUNSHI MARG
BOMBAY-400 007

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1st Edition — 1965
2nd Edition — 1972
3rd Edition — 1977
4th Edition — 1980
5th Edition — 1982
6th Edition — 1985
7th Edition — 1988
8th Edition — 1989

Price Rs. 150/-

PRINTED IN INDIA
Printed at GOOD PRINT.
Published by S. Ramakrishnan, Executive Secretary,
Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kulapati Munshi Marg, Bombay 400 007.

FOREWORD

Smt. Kamala Subramaniam has attempted not only a summary of the great and wonderful epic, *Mahabharata*, but has also brought out the magic of its human interest and spiritual profundity. Besides bringing the central story into relief, she has given due place to all important conversations and episodes.

To quote what I wrote about *Mahabharata* in 1951:

> "The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita*, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas the climax of which is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto. Through such books alone, the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life."

To an English reader, this volume will bring home the validity of the comment made by generations of Indian authors that "what is not there is nowhere to be found".

Smt. Subramaniam's style is lucid and expressive. At places, it reads not as a summary, but the original.

Smt. Subramaniam has rendered great service to the English-knowing public which has neither the time nor the ability to read the original.

I congratulate her on the conscientious labour that she has put in in preparing this volume.

BOMBAY:
May 26, 1965

K. M. MUNSHI

PREFACE

For the last so many years the MAHABHARATA has held me in thrall. The RAMAYANA and the MAHABHARATA are the two renowned epics of India. The MAHABHARATA is the longer of the two. There are more characters in it and the story too is more complicated than the RAMAYANA.

In those days, that is twenty-five to thirty years ago, children were more familiar with these two stories than they are now. It was then the fashion to stage these stories and also there used to be HARIKATHAS where the stories were narrated to an audience. But now the days are changed. I have noticed that, on the whole, many children and youngsters today are almost strangers to the stories. This is indeed a sad state of affairs.

I have always wanted to share the MAHABHARATA with everyone, specially youngsters. There are a number of difficulties attending this. The most conspicuous of them is, of course, the length of the book. It is made up of eighteen volumes, "Parvas" as they are called; and each is made up of roughly three to four hundred pages of poetry. Unless one is devoted to the epic it is not possible to read it through easily. The language is the next hurdle. Nowadays there are very few youngsters who are familiar enough with Sanskrit to read through the book in the original.

The only alternative is to read translations. I have seen several translations of the MAHABHARATA, and not one is satisfactory. They are all *literal* translations. A literal translation is like the wrong side of a tapestry: the threads are all there but the pattern is missing. It is so with this great epic. It is not possible to do full justice to it in a literal translation. The English used by the translator is not suited to the elaborate similes which are common to Sanskrit. Let me quote a couple of instances. In Sanskrit Arjuna is called "Bharatarshabha". This is very pleasing to the ear in Sanskrit. But, when translated into English it has to be: "O Bull of the Bharata Race!". One can see how awkward it sounds. Again, a woman is addressed as "Madagajagaamini" in Sanskrit. In English it has to be "O woman with the gait of an elephant in rut!" This sounds so ridiculous. Literal translations fail because of the vast difference between the Eastern and the Western ways of description. Indian ideas of beauty are far different from those of the West. Again, I have seen several condensations of the MAHABHARATA: books which give us just the story of the epic. Here again,

there is a handicap. The story is there of course. But the characters in the story are not handled properly. They cannot be, since there is not enough space for it.

For a long time I have wanted to write a book which will rectify these faults. I have wanted to present the book in such a manner that the story will capture the imagination of the reader. I want my book to be a narration of the stupendous drama which was enacted years ago. To me the MAHABHARATA is like a Greek Tragedy. I am fascinated by the many characters who appear in it. I have tried to bring out the characters of the many heroes who appear in it, as sympathetically as I could. Having studied Shakespeare, one cannot help studying the MAHABHARATA with the eyes of a dramatic critic. Viewed from this angle the epic presents immense possibilities.

Considering all these things, I have rendered the epic into English. It is not quite a translation: not in the usual sense of the word. One might call it a 'free translation'. I have tried to narrate the story as dramatically as possible. I have narrated it in simple straightforward English. In this task, if one has to retain the spirit of the epic and the atmosphere, one has to fall back upon the quaint, old-fashioned English. This seems to suit the epic perfectly. At times, crisp clear English does not work. I find the blending of the old and the new to be the perfect medium for the narration. So I have deliberately adopted the style, which, to my thinking, is absolutely perfect.

My aim, as I said before, is to bring out the dramatic significance of the many scenes. Wherever the situation was worth some trouble, I have taken the trouble and added a few touches, a few thoughts of my own, to enhance the dramatic value of the situation. But I have been faithful to the original throughout: except, perhaps, in two places or three. Even there, I have not departed from the facts. Only I have tried to intensify the dramatic value of the situation by my embellishments. One of them, if I remember right, is the names of the villages which Yudhishthira asks for. The names Indraprastha, Vrikaprastha, Jayanta and Varanavata do not occur in the context. But they are mentioned in the play VENISAMHARA and I have used them. The other, is, perhaps, the scene in which Parikshit is given life. But the scene itself is so sublime that no exaggeration can be considered sufficient for the grandeur of the scene.

If, after reading the book, a few at least will read the epic in the original, my desire will be fulfilled. May I say that my book is just a guide into the vast ocean called the MAHABHARATA?

KAMALA SUBRAMANIAM

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CHAPTER 1

ON THE BANKS OF THE GANGA

The king had always been fond of hunting. It was a passion with him. He had reached the banks of the river Ganga. It was there, he saw her. She was like a vision. There she stood, her skin glowing like gold. Her eyes were large and lustrous: and her hair which she was combing with her fingers was long, looking like the proverbial Rahu trying to envelop the moon. He stood rooted to the spot drinking her with his eyes. It seemed to him that a nymph from the high heavens had descended on the earth to feast his eyes and only his eyes. He approached her. She turned on hearing the noise and looked at him. A blush suffused her face which became downcast. A smile hovered on her lips. Her toe was tracing patterns on the ground below and her fingers, which were like ivory sticks, twined and untwined the strands of her dark hair. A moment later she lifted her eyes and looked at him. He knew then that she cared for him.

He went near her. He took her reluctant hand in his and said: "You are so very beautiful. I want you to be mine. I am Santanu, the king of Hastinapura. I love you. I cannot live without you". She smiled and said: "The moment I looked at you I knew that I had to be yours. I will be your queen. But there is a condition. You must not cross me in anything at any time. The moment you displease me I will go away from you never to return". "So be it", said the love-lorn monarch and led her to his city.

She was, to him, the ideal wife: a companion in every sense of the word. She pleased him immensely with her charm, her beauty, her sweet words and her many good qualities. He lost count of time when he was with her. She was called Ganga.

Days passed by: months too. Ganga bore the king a son. His joy was immense. At last, a son and heir had been born to adorn the time-honoured throne of the great Pauravas. He hastened to the queen's chambers. He was told that she was not there. He heard that she had hurried to the banks of the river Ganga with the new-born child clasped in her arms. He could not understand. He hurried to the river bank. There his horrified eyes saw a scene which he could never blot out from the tablets of his memory. Ganga, his dear beloved Ganga, had just flung the new-born child into the river. There was a look on her face which teased him for days together. She looked as though a great load was off her

mind. He wanted to ask her. But he could not. He remembered the promise he had given her: that he would never, never cross her and displease her.

It happened again a year later. And again! And again! Seven of the king's sons were thrown into the river by Ganga. The king was silent. Love, they say, is blind. But no. It is an extra eye which sees only the good in the beloved, blind to all the other faults. Ganga meant his very life to the king. But then, the desire for an heir was just as powerful. He knew no peace. A year passed thus. The eighth child was born. Ganga rushed to the river with the child clasped in her arms. The king was speechless with grief and anger. He rushed behind her. He held her back. He spoke harshly to her for the first time. He said: "What inhuman act is this? I cannot bear it any longer. I cannot see all my sons destroyed like this. Why do you do it? How can a mother, or anyone for that matter, break the stem of a flower ere yet it blooms? Please give me this one son. I cannot keep silent any longer".

There was a strange smile on the lips of Ganga. It was sad and it was happy too. She spoke very gently to the king. She said: "My lord, the time has come when I must leave you. You have broken your promise. I must hurry away from here. This child of ours will live. I will take him with me and give him back to you when the time comes. I will call him Devavrata. His other name will be Gangeya". The king was numb with woe. He could not follow all that she was saying. He knew only this: the woman who meant everything to him was about to leave him for ever. And all because he had asked her not to kill his eighth son. He looked at her with mute appeal in his eyes. Words came to his lips. "Why do you do this to me? Can you not see that my life is bound up in you and that I cannot live without you? You cannot abandon me and go away! Ganga, you loved me once. In the name of that love I implore you, do not leave me and go away".

A look of pain crossed the beautiful face of Ganga. She said: "Oh my lord, can you not realize that I am going because I must? I am Ganga. I belong to the heavens. Because of a curse I had to live the life of a mortal on this earth. You were the great king Mahabhishak in your previous birth. You were once with Indra in his court. I came there. You looked at me with eyes full of desire and I wanted to be yours. The celestials did not like it. They sent me to the earth to be the wife of Mahabhishak who was to be born as Santanu the son of Prateepa. Thus our life of love became possible. We have been happy. My lord, do not try to stem the tide of time. Things that have been ordained to happen will happen. Not you, nor I nor all the gods in the heavens can alter the order of things to come".

The king looked puzzled. He said: "Still I do not understand. Why then, the killing of these seven children who were born to you and me? Was that also part of the curse?" "Yes", said Ganga. "These eight children are the eight Vasus who were cursed to be born on this world. I had promised them that I would bear them and grant them release from this life the moment they were born. But this eighth has been cursed to live a long life on this earth. Hence he has been allowed to live. Do not grieve. my lord. I will give you your heir and I will take care that he is prepared in a manner suited to the role he has to play: the heir to the throne of the illustrious Pauravas".

When the veil of illusion is torn and the eyes are allowed to look on Truth, the eyes, we find, are not strong enough to do so. It was so with the king. Ganga, the goddess from the heavens thought fit to play wife to him. But Santanu, a mere mortal, was not great enough to bear that honour. His mind refused to face the truth. He was dumb-founded when he heard all that Ganga had to say. It was too much for him. He could see just two things. First, his Ganga would leave him for ever, never to come back. The other realization was that he had a son now, a son to uphold the name of the Pauravas. It was easy for Ganga to follow the emotions that passed through the mind of Santanu. With a look of pity mingled with love she looked at the king and said in a gentle voice: "My beloved, please do not be unhappy. I will take excellent care of our son. He will be a great man. He will be greater than all the Pauravas who have graced the throne of the race of the Moon".

Ganga faded away from sight. Santanu spent hours re-living the moments filled with pain: the last few moments with Ganga. With a sigh of resignation he turned away slowly and wended his way homewards, a home where loneliness, utter loneliness awaited him.

Chapter 2

SIXTEEN YEARS LATER

Sixteen years had gone by. There are crushed hearts that will not break and the king's plight was such. His life was now empty. Life had lost all meaning. But that did not in any way affect his rule. He was an ideal king. The people were happy under his rule. His only pleasure. as of yore, was hunting. He would always be haunting the banks of the river Ganga. That was the one spot which gave him comfort.

One day, as he was wandering along the banks of the river a strange sight met his eyes. The river was not flowing. It looked as though something held up the river. Full of curiosity he walked along the banks to see what was happening. He saw a network of arrows. The arrows had been so well-knit that not a drop of water could pass through. Santanu stood rooted to the spot, amazed at the sudden check imposed on the river.

He realised that he was not alone. Ganga, his beloved Ganga was standing beside him with a sweet serene smile. The king was overwhelmed. He looked at her with eyes full of tears. He said: "Ganga, so you have taken pity on me. All these years I have been lonely, so lonely. I want you. I cannot live without you. Please come back to me. You have forgiven me, I know. Or else you would not have come now. Come, let us hasten to the city. Make us happy again". Ganga looked at him with pity in her eyes. She said: "My lord, all that is in the past. I will not come back. When the sun has set on a day it is foolish to ask him to come back so that you can live the day once again. The sun will come back: but only to usher in another day. No one can go back, not even for a moment. But that is all beside the point. Let me tell you why I have come. Do you see the river being held up?" "Yes", said the king. "That was the sight which held me spell-bound when you came. Tell me, Ganga, who is it who is holding you in check? You, whom all the wealth of my love could not hold back?"

Even as they were talking, there was a sudden deafening noise. It was the roar of the river whose course had become unchecked now. From the distance there rushed up to them a boy: a beautiful youth whose noble face was shining with great excitement. He hugged Ganga with his arms and said: "Mother! Mother! I held up the river! Again, I was able to do it!" Ganga looked at the king. He was a picture of amazement. "Your son!" he said. "Then, surely, surely, he must be —". "Yes, my lord", said Ganga. "Your guess is right. He is our son". She turned to the young man and said: "Devavrata, this is your father. Salute him". Santanu lifted up the prostrate form of his son and embraced him. Ganga said: "This is the reason for my coming. I have brought your son to you. Take him with you to comfort you. He is well versed in all the arts that a kshatriya should know. Vasishtha has been his Guru. From him he has learnt the Vedas and the Vedangas. From Brihaspati, the divine guru, he has learnt political science. At my request Bhargava, the enemy of kshatriyas, has taught him archery. My son is now proficient in all arts. I have fitted him to be a worthy heir to the throne of the Pauravas. I give this hero to you. Take him to the home of heroes". Ganga vanished.

The king turned homewards even as he did sixteen years ago. But today he was not alone. His son, this son born of Ganga, was there beside him. Santanu was proud of this handsome young man who stood fair to be the only obsession of the king who had been lonely so long. Together, father and son galloped towards Hastinapura.

CHAPTER 3

THE FISHERMAN'S DAUGHTER

Four years passed. In the company of his son the king passed many happy days. Santanu doted on him and Devavrata was an ideal son. He was lost in his father. It seemed as though he wanted to make up to his father for all his years of loneliness. They were inseparable. The king crowned Devavrata as Yuvaraja. The people were delirious with joy. Fate, all the while, was playing a waiting game. The sight of unsullied happiness is too much for her. She always manages to add the bitter drop to the cup of joy.

One day the king had gone out hunting. He was alone. As he was going along, a strange perfume assailed his senses. It was a perfume he had never known before. It overpowered him with its sweetness. Piqued by this strange perfume the king followed it. He wanted to trace it to its source. He went on and on. At the end of the quest he saw that the source was a woman! He had reached the banks of the river Yamuna. There, on the banks of the river, he saw a beautiful woman. She was in the act of tying up the boat. Her form was faultless. She was perfect. No other word could describe the beauty of her limbs, her face, her eyes. The eyes were downcast now with shyness as though she could not bear the intensity of the king's gaze. Her form was ill-concealed by the garb of a fisher-girl. Santanu looked at her. He wanted her. He went near her and said: "Who are you? What are you doing here?" She spoke in a soft voice. "I am a fisher girl. My father is the king of the fishermen. It is my duty to ply the boat between the two banks of this Yamuna river". The king went straight to the father of the girl and said: "I am Santanu the monarch of the race of the Moon. I come from the city Hastina. While I was hunting in the forest, a strange perfume teased me. I followed it to the banks of the Yamuna. There I saw a beautiful woman. She tells me that she is your daughter. I want her for my wife". The king of the fishermen was profuse in his words of supplication. He said: "You are right, my lord. The perfume

is part of my daughter and it led you to her. In this entire world there is no other person more fit to have my daughter than your noble self. To be the queen of the Paurava monarch is the greatest honour that can befall a poor fisher girl. I am quite willing to give my daughter to you in marriage. But, my lord, there is a condition. If you are willing to grant that, my daughter is yours".

The king was impatient. He said: "If it is possible to grant it I will certainly grant you your 'conditions' as you call it". The fisherman said: "It has been said that the son of my daughter will be heir to the throne of the king. If you promise to make the son born of her, the king of Hastina after you, I will give her to you willingly". The king was speechless. He was thinking of Ganga: of the day when she brought Devavrata to him saying, "I present this hero to you. Take him to the home of heroes". The face of his beloved son came to his mind's eye, the son whom he had crowned as the Yuvaraja. He thought of the bond of love that bound him to Devavrata. Without a word Santanu returned to his chariot. With a heart full of pain and a longing for the unattainable, the king returned to the city.

CHAPTER 4

THE VOW OF CELIBACY

Devavrata found his father suddenly different. Gone were the happy days of perfect companionship. This new father would not talk to him even as he was wont to do. The prince tried his best to make him disclose to him the cause of this despondency. But his attempts were fruitless. The king lost interest in everything: even in his favourite pastime, hunting. At long last, the king spoke to Devavrata one day. He said. "In this great House of the Kurus you are an only son. You are, to me, more than a hundred sons put together. Nor am I keen on marrying again. But I am worried about the fact that you are an only son. It is like having one eye. God has granted you a long life. I know it. But my mind is clouded. The wise say that having an only son is like having no son at all. You are a great warrior. If anything should happen to you in one of the wars, the great lineage of the Kurus will be without an heir. It will be destroyed. This has been the worry which is working havoc in my mind". The prince stood silent for a moment; then he walked away without speaking a word.

Devavrata went at once to the charioteer of the King. His intelligence had penetrated through the screen of words that his father had created. He accosted the charioteer in his direct manner. He asked: "You are my father's friend and confidant. Tell me, who is this woman who has captured my father's heart? Tell me at once so that I can do the needful and make him happy". After much hesitation, the charioteer said: "My lord, the king may not approve of my telling you. The woman is the daughter of a fisherman. She has annexed your father's heart. The king asked her father for the hand of his daughter. He refused to grant the king his wish unless he acceded to his condition: that the son born of his daughter should be installed as king on the throne of the Pauravas. Your father thought of you. Not being able to do the unthinkable, the king returned to Hastinapura.'

Without telling his father Devavrata set out towards the forest. He reached the dwelling place of the fisherman. The woman whom his father loved was there near the bank of the Yamuna, tying up the boat. She looked at him and for a moment thought that it was the king himself. Devavrata saluted her and asked to be taken to the presence of her father. The fisherman greeted his guest with all the respect due to him. Without any preamble the prince spoke. "I hear that my father, the great monarch of Hastinapura, is smitten with love for your daughter. What else do you want? Do you think you have not been honoured enough when the king of the entire world comes to you asking you for a favour? You have, I heard, the audacity to refuse him his heart's desire!" "My lord," said the fisherman, "I wanted a price. I know very well that a great honour has been conferred on me when your father wanted the hand of my daughter. But it has been predicted that the son of Satyavati will be a monarch. I know all about you. You are the crown prince, the yuvaraja. The king dotes on you. And so, he was silent when I stated to him my condition. He could not grant it to me. This is all that happened".

A frown of annoyance passed across the face of Devavrata. That his dear father should have wanted something and could not get it was a thing he could not imagine. He said: "You want your grandson to be the king after my father. So be it. I will renounce my claim to the throne. Now, are you satisfied?" The young prince, the hope of the world, amazed the fisherman by his words. A look of unbelief came to the eyes of the fisherman. He was dumb-founded at the casual manner in which this young prince renounced the throne. He smiled and said: "My lord, you are indeed a true prince. Your father's happiness means everything to you. In your nobleness, you have renounced the throne. But how can I be sure that your sons will be just as selfless as you are?

What assurance have I that they will not contest the claims of Satyavati's son?" The prince was shocked at the extent of the man's cupidity. With a smile of contempt he said: "Not satisfied yet? I will satisfy you. I will not marry. I vow before the denizens of heaven and earth and the nether regions, in the name of all that is dear and sacred to me in the name of my guru Bhagavan Bhargava, in the name of my mother Ganga, in the name of Dharma, that I will never marry as long as I live. Now, are you really satisfied?"

Flowers rained on him from the heavens. The word "BHEESHMA" resounded from all the quarters: so terrible was the vow he had taken. "Here she is", said the fisherman, "your mother". He brought Satyavati. He stood her before the prince. Devavrata saluted her, placed her in his chariot and rushed towards Hastinapura.

Devavrata hastened to the presence of his father. He presented the young woman to him and said: "Father, I have brought her for you. Please take her and shake off this despondency. Please be happy, father" The sky was still resounding with the cry: "Bheeshma! Bheeshma!" Santanu heard all that had happened. He was stricken with grief. Perhaps his conscience smote him. He could not bear to think of his son, so full of manliness, so beautiful, so divine, living a life of permanent self-imposed celibacy. But the web once woven we cannot unweave. Santanu had got his heart's desire. In his gratitude and his love for this son of his he granted a boon to his beloved son. Devavrata could die when it pleased him and only when it pleased him. Death had to wait on him. All the king's accumulated *tapas* was used up for this boon. In his own way, he was trying to make up to his son for all that he had missed in life.

The marriage between Santanu and Satyavati was celebrated. The king spent a few happy years with her. Two sons were born to them. They were named Chitrangada and Vichitraveerya. The years rolled by only too soon and the king, now grown old, passed away in course of time and was gathered to his forefathers. It was now evident that Devavrata, better known as Bheeshma, had to bear the burden of the kingdom. Prince Chitrangada was too young to be entrusted with the kingdom. Bheeshma installed him as the Yuvaraja and acted as regent for him.

Bheeshma spent several uneventful years thus. Nothing remarkable happened. All on a sudden, tragedy struck like a thunderbolt. There was a Gandharva king called Chitrangada. He did not relish the idea of a mortal having his name. He challenged the human Chitrangada to fight with him and prove himself to be worthy of his name. On the field of Kurukshetra, there was fought a battle between the two Chitrangadas. Santanu's son was vanquished and killed. Bheeshma was stricken with

grief. He performed the coronation of the younger son of Satyavati. Again the regency fell on the shoulders of Bheeshma. He ruled the kingdom in the name of his brother. The people were very happy. Everyone was happy in Hastinapura under the rule of their uncrowned king, Bheeshma.

CHAPTER 5

THE SWAYAMVARA AT KASI

The young prince Vichitraveerya was now the centre of Satyavati's hopes. He was her only son. Bheeshma was a father to him. Years passed. The time came when Bheeshma thought of his marriage. The king of Kasi had three lovely daughters: Amba, Ambika and Ambaalika. These princesses, thought Bheeshma, were fit enough to be the brides for his brother. There came to him news that the king of Kasi was holding a *swayamvara* for his daughters. Bheeshma could not brook the insult offered him. It had been the custom to give the daughters of Kasi to the princes of the Kuru house. Bheeshma resented this departure from the usual custom. He descended on the city where the *swayamvara* was being held.

The preparations for the *swayamvara* were indeed thorough. Kings from all over Bharatavarsha had come to attend it. The hall was bright with the jewels worn by the princes who had assembled there. The air was thick with the perfume of the flowers which they were wearing. They all saw Bheeshma. There were smiles of derision, sneers and contemptuous remarks. Some said: "Look at this Devavrata, a confirmed bachelor, who has come to the *swayamvara* of these lovely princesses! Indeed, who can resist the law of nature? Their beauty is enough to weaken the austerities of even rishis. What then, can we say of a poor mortal like Devavrata? He has forgotten the oath he took to satisfy his father. He has come hoping that he may be chosen by one of the princesses. Vain hopes! What vanity he has! Who will look at this man, well past the prime of youth, when we are all here!"

A voice like the clap of thunder greeted the kings who had assembled. Bheeshma said: "Indeed I have come to the *swayamvara*. I am going to carry these maidens to Hastinapura. They will be the brides of my brother Vichitraveerya, the Kuru monarch. They will be queens of the Kuru house. If you have valour enough, bravery enough, you are welcome

to rescue them from me. I am prepared to fight anyone who will dare to oppose me". Bheeshma took the princesses one by one by the hand and placed them in his chariot. He was ready to proceed towards his home. The kings were furious. The king of Kasi looked to them for help. They all rushed at the departing prince. Bheeshma stopped his chariot. There ensued a fiery battle between the kings on the one side and Bheeshma on the other. They were defeated easily. The chariot proceeded once again towards Hastinapura, the Kuru capital.

The king of Salva was a great hero. He was one of the many who had come to attend the *swayamvara*. He offered to fight with Bheeshma. His fighting was of no mean order. He wounded Bheeshma in the chest. Everyone was amazed at the fighting of Salva who was able to wound Bheeshma. Enraged at the challenge of Salva, Bheeshma fought with more vigour than he had displayed so far. Bheeshma killed the charioteer of Salva, then his horses. Salva was without a chariot and he was without a weapon. He was on the ground at the mercy of his opponent. In his nobleness, Bheeshma left him without killing him and went unchallenged the rest of the way to Hastinapura.

Bheeshma arrived in the city. The people crowded in the streets to see the three maidens who looked like three moons in captivity. They were so very beautiful. The king's apartments were soon reached. Bheeshma descended from his chariot, the princesses following him. He reached the apartments of Satyavati. He stood them before her and said: "Look, mother! Look at the brides I have brought for our Vichitraveerya". Satyavati was pleased. The young prince was sent for. He looked at the maidens and was pleased. He looked with love and gratitude at Bheeshma and fell at his feet. Bheeshma embraced him and his eyes were wet with tears of love. He loved this brother of his as a father loves his son.

"Please, if I may say something", said a soft frightened voice. Bheeshma turned round. It was Amba, the eldest of the three princesses. With her form trembling like a leaf she addressed the queen mother and Bheeshma together. She said: "When my lord Bheeshma entered the hall and carried us away by force I was in the act of garlanding Salva. I had already chosen him as my husband". "Why did you not tell me there?" asked Bheeshma. "You should have told me before I left Kasi. Why were you silent?" "How could I, my lord?" said Amba. "You were so abrupt in your actions. Before I could gather up enough courage to talk, we were half way through the journey. Hence I thought I would speak now". They were all upset by this new complication which had set in. The young prince said: "I do not think it is right to marry a woman whose heart is in the keeping of someone else". Bheeshma and

Satyavati felt that he was right. Bheeshma spoke to Amba. "You have chosen a husband already. We do not think it right to keep you here. I will provide the proper escort for you. You are at liberty to go to Salva".

With her heart full of love Amba reached the kingdom of Salva. She went to the king and said: "Look at me, my lord. In the *swayamvara* hall I was in the act of garlanding you when Bheeshma carried us all away. When we reached Hastinapura, I told him that I had already chosen my husband. The noble Bheeshma sent me to you. Please accept me". With a loud laugh Salva said: "Accept you? Do you think I am a beggar to accept gifts from my enemy? Devavrata took you by your right hand. He won you in battle. He defeated all of us. According to the Dharma of kshatriyas, the man who wins a girl in fight is her lord. Bheeshma is your lord. He is your husband. Go to him. Ask him to marry you. I cannot accept you".

With her heart filled with pain and humiliation, Amba retraced her steps to Hastinapura and stood in the presence of Bheeshma. Tears were running down her face. Bheeshma was shocked at the condition of the young girl. He said: "What ails thee, fair maiden? I am surprised to see you here. I sent you to Salva. Why have you come back?" Amba said: "My journey was fruitless. I am now richer in the knowledge of Dharmasastra. Salva looks on me as his sister. He says that a man who wins a girl in fight is her lawful husband. You took me by my right hand and placed me in your chariot and later fought with all the kings there. You, I hear, must marry me. I have no one now. You must grant me life. Let not my womanhood be wasted. Please marry me".

Bheeshma was overcome with compassion for the woman who stood weeping in front of him. His heart went out to her in pity. He could not speak; for, tears were choking him, tears that he dared not shed. He was sorry for this woman whose life was ruined because of him. He spoke to her gently. He said: "I am grieved at the way things have taken shape. I cannot marry you. You know that I have sworn to be a *brahmacharin* all my life. How can I marry you? Please abandon those thoughts from your mind. It is not possible. If you had only told me in Kasi that you had already chosen your husband, these things would not have happened. But no one can control fate. You can never be my bride. You can go back to Salva and coax him to marry you. I cannot help you out of your predicament. I would have, if things had been different. But now, bound as I am by my terrible oath, I cannot help you in the manner you suggest." Bheeshma walked away from her presence.

Poor ill-starred Amba spent six years thus, without avail. With her heart full of hatred for Bheeshma who was the cause of her unhappiness, she went to the forest. She met several ascetics there. She told them the story of her life and expressed her desire to stay with them and perform penance. They were very dubious. They did not want a young unmarried woman in their midst. They did not know what they were to do. To their great relief there came to their hermitage the great Hotravahana, the grandfather of Amba. He heard about her tragedy. He spoke comforting words to her. He said: "The great Bhargava is a great friend of mine. Bhargava is the guru of Bheeshma. He will command his pupil to obey him. He will make Bheeshma marry you. Bheeshma cannot disobey his guru".

A few days later Bhagavan Bhargava came to the forest. Hotravahana told him about the pathetic story of Amba. The great sage was sorry for her and said: "I will certainly speak to Bheeshma about it. If I ask him to marry you, he will certainly obey me". He sent for his beloved pupil Bheeshma. Hearing that his guru wanted him, Bheeshma hurried to his presence. He fell at his feet and said: "What would your gracious presence? Why have you sent for me?" Bhargava raised him and embraced him. He said: "My child, I want you to help a person in distress. Do you see this beautiful woman?" Bheeshma turned round and looked at Amba. He said: "I know her, my lord. She is a woman who has been cheated by fate. She wanted to marry Salva, but he would not have her. I could not, since I have sworn not to marry. Hence she had to leave Hastinapura and go away. But what has she to do with my coming to your presence?" Bhargava said: "I have promised to her that I would make you marry her. You must help me to keep my word. You must marry her". Bheeshma turned his pained eyes on his guru. He said: "My lord, you know about the terrible oath I have taken. I cannot marry. Even if *you* ask me to, I cannot marry". Bhargava tried his best to convince Bheeshma that his duty was to obey the commands of his guru. But it was not possible for him to convince Bheeshma. He was firm. Bhargava was furious with him. He said: "I will curse you. Or else, you must fight a duel with me". Bheeshma was in a dilemma. He loved his guru. He did not want to be cursed by Bhargava. That was the dread alternative. He had to choose. He perferred to fight. He said: "My lord, you know how much I love you. You ask me to fight with you. I would rather fight with you. I do not want to be cursed by you, my lord: not by you who love me".

A terrible battle was fought between these two. It was watched by the lords of the heavens too. The battle raged for days and nights. There was no lessening of the valour of either. On the last day of the

fight, Bheeshma had decided to send the *astra* called Praswaapa. That meant the destruction of the world. The gods, led by Narada and Rudra, intervened and said: "Bheeshma, stop this fighting. Do not send the *astra*. You are not the person to destroy the world. It has to be done by someone else". They convinced him that he should be the first to withdraw from the fight since it would be an insult to his guru if he was made to stop first from fighting. Bheeshma agreed. The fight was stopped. Bhargava embraced his pupil and said: "You are the greatest of all fighters. I could not defeat you." He turned to Amba and said: "My child, I tried my best, as you saw. I cannot shake Bheeshma's resolution. He will not move away from the path of Truth. Please go away. Your desire is not to be achieved".

CHAPTER 6

AMBA'S THIRST FOR REVENGE

Amba left that forest and went elsewhere. She performed a terrible penance. She denied herself even the bare necessaries and continued her penance. Shanmukha, the son of Lord Sankara, was pleased with her. He appeared before her. He gave her a garland of ever-fresh lotuses and said: "My child, take this garland with you. The person who wears it round his neck will be the person who will kill Bheeshma." Pleased with herself and with the gift of Shanmukha, Amba set out on her quest for revenge.

Amba went to all the powerful kings of the land and tried to persuade them to take up her cause. They all refused to do it, all of them. Even her assurance, that the garland given by a god was a sure sign of success, was of no avail. Bheeshma was so powerful a personality that there was not a single kshatriya who dared to oppose him and make an enemy of him. Amba went to the court of Drupada, the king of the Panchalas. She laid the facts before him and asked him to help her. He heard her and said: "I am very sorry to see your plight. If it had not been Bheeshma but someone else, I would have championed your cause. But this Bheeshma is different. He is a righteous man. I cannot find any cause to fight with him. He is not only powerful, but he is good. I am sorry. I have to refuse you this your request".

Amba was desperate. She flung the garland round a pillar in the great hall of Drupada. The king was overcome with consternation.

Everyone was afraid of Bheeshma. Drupada was upset by this impulsive action of Amba. She left his hall in fury. The garland was there, on the pillar. No one dared to touch it and it was guarded very carefully.

Amba went to the forest once again. Her severe penance was resumed. In her heart there was place for only one emotion: hatred, hatred for Bheeshma. She hated Bheeshma and her only desire was to see him dead. Her penance went on for a long time. Finally, Lord Sankara appeared before her and said: "Grieve not, my child. In your next birth you will yourself kill Bheeshma". Amba was impatient. She said: "In my next birth, I will not remember my hatred. I may kill him. But I will not be able to taste the joy of revenge. I must kill him now". Sankara smiled and said: "Do not worry. In your next birth you will remember every one of the many incidents in this your life. You will be born as the child of the king of the Panchalas, Drupada. You will be a woman first. Later, you will become a man. I assure you that you will have your revenge. You will certainly kill your enemy, Bheeshma".

Amba built a huge fire and threw herself into it. Later, she was born as the daughter of Drupada. One day, while playing in the hall of the king, Amba saw the garland of lotuses which hung on the pillar. She took it down and placed it round her neck. Drupada, on hearing about this, came running. He was overcome with fear and consternation that she had dared to do such a thing. Amba smiled serenely at her father and said: "Be not so amazed, father. I have been born as your child for the sole purpose of wearing this garland. You can live in peace and leave the rest to me".

She was called Sikhandi. Her education was given to her by Drona who, like the rest of the world, thought that she was a man. Years passed. By the kindness of a Yaksha, Amba lost her sex and became a man. She grew up in the house of Drupada with her hatred for Bheeshma burning like a torch in her heart.

Chapter 7

SATYAVATI AND BHEESHMA

The marriage of Vichitraveerya with the two princesses Ambika and Ambaalika was duly performed. The wives considered themselves to be immensely fortunate in having such a handsome sweet-natured man for

their lord. They lived a very happy life. But not for long. With Bheeshma to attend to the affairs of the state, the care-free prince spent all the time in the company of his lovely wives. Fate struck again. Young Vichitraveerya was found to suffer from the dreadful disease, consumption. Not all the devotion of his people nor the skill of the best physicians could save him from an early death.

Satyavati was stunned by the calamity that had befallen her. The loss of both her sons was too terrible. But what hurt her more was the thought that the Kuru House did not have an heir. This was the fact that broke her heart. She spent hours together trying to think of a way to rekindle the flame that was extinguished. She summoned Bheeshma to her presence. She said: "Look at me, my son. I have now no hope of happiness. I lost my beloved lord. He was gathered to his forefathers. I could bear that since he had reached an old age and he followed the rule that old men must die. Chitrangada was killed. Before I could reconcile myself to the loss that nearly killed me, I find Vichitraveerya dead. The only hope of the Kuru House has been destroyed in the flower of youth. I am desperate. The line must be continued. I have decided on the course of action. I know the way to continue the line of the Kurus. With you rests the task of making the Kuru line live again".

Bheeshma was surprised. He said: "Mother, how can I, a confirmed bachelor, continue the line?" Satyavati said: "My son Vichitraveerya died without leaving a son. His two wives whom you brought for him are still young, with their heart's desires unfulfilled. The only Dharma evident to me is this: you must take them and make them mothers of the future scions of the house of Kuru. You must do this for the reason that the lineage must continue. This rule was followed by many of your ancestors. This is the only way. You must take the wives of your brother, and your sons will then be the true descendants of Kuru. It is your solemn duty to do this".

Unruffled by this preposterous suggestion, Bheeshma answered her patiently. He said: "Mother, because you are overpowered by the grief and shock caused by your sudden losses, you are suggesting these things to me. There is no doubt that a rule like the one you suggest does exist. I am aware of it. Custom too, has lent its approval to this rule. But mother, your asking me to follow this rule is wrong and improper. You know that I have sworn to forgo the throne and married life too. I did it for your sake and surely, you could not have forgotten that! Do you not remember the terrible vow I took? I have taken an oath that, in this life of mine, woman has no place. Now you suggest that I should take the wives of my dead brother. You are indeed very much upset by

the death of our beloved Vichitraveerya. Else, you would not have suggested this to me. I am sorry for you, mother. But please do not ask such a thing of me".

Satyavati said: "I remember the oath and the circumstances under which you took that terrible oath. I know too, that you did it for the sake of your father and me. But now the circumstances have changed. Devavrata, it was because a son of mine had to be king that you took the oath. But my sons are now dead. The race threatens to die out. So, as an *apaddharma*, as a desperate cure, as a last resort, I am suggesting this course of action. You must not let the Kuru clan die out. I am your mother. It is your duty to do what pleases me. You must obey me. That is a greater Dharma than all the oaths you have taken".

Bheeshma had his temper under control till now. But he could not hold out any longer. Perhaps, in his mind's eye, the past events came back like a landscape reflected in a drop of dew. His mother Ganga, his happy boyhood with her in the heavens, his education, first in political science from Brihaspati and Sukra and then his learning the Vedas and the Vedangas from Vasishtha. Bheeshma's mind went now to the days he spent with his guru Bhargava learning archery. His mother had made him learn all this because she wanted him to be a worthy son of the House of the Kurus. She wanted him to be the ideal king. She had told him that so often. His mind went to the happy days he spent with his father, four years of perfect companionship. They had been comrades. His father was lost in love of him and he in his turn was devoted to Santanu. Bheeshma had been crowned the Yuvaraja. Then, out of the air, there appeared this Satyavati. To please his father and the cupidity of her father, he gave up all that was beautiful in this world. It was then that he, young as he was, became old in a moment, just like that, OLD. Nothing seemed worthwhile since then. He conformed his life to a rigid pattern of black and white. Then came Amba, the crimson thread that shuttled in and out of the black and white fabric he had woven for himself and caused such havoc. He would not take her because he could not. He broke her heart and ruined her womanhood because of the terrible oath he had taken. He had not obeyed his guru, Bhargava, when he asked him to take Amba. And now, after all this, his step-mother 'commanded' him to take the wives of his dead brother!

All his anger unleashed itself as he spoke in a voice trembling with fury. He said: "Mother, you do not know the strength of my mind. You do not know the firmness of my Dharma. You do not know me at all. Nothing will make me do what you command me to do. The earth may lose her perfume. Water may lose the sweetness that is part of her. The sun may lose his brilliance or the moon her snowy coolness. Lord Dharma may abandon his Dharma but I will not swerve from the

path of Truth. Truth, to me, is greater than all the promised rewards of heaven. The world may end but not the strength of my mind. Nothing, nothing can move me: not even you with your power over me as my mother. I have once dared to defy my guru for the sake of this oath. I will not be moved by your words. Please desist from this foolish attempt".

CHAPTER 8

THE ADVENT OF VYAASA

Again and again Satyavati tried to remonstrate with Bheeshma. But he stood firm like a rock unaffected by the waves dashing against it. He would not be moved. Satyavati was a picture of woe.

Bheeshma was sorry for her in her unhappiness. Taking pity on her he said: "Mother, since an heir means so much to you, I have a suggestion. They say that a noble line, when it threatens to be extinguished, can be revived by a son born of a noble brahmin. When my guru Bhargava destroyed all the kshatriyas, this was how many of the royal lines were made to continue. If you can think of a worthy brahmin we can request him to give an heir to the throne. It has been done before. This is a custom which has won the approval of the great rishis". Poor Satyavati had to reconcile herself to this. She was displeased with Bheeshma since a true descendant of the Kuru House was no longer possible. Satyavati, after a lot of hesitation told Bheeshma about something which had happened long ago, how, before her marriage with Santanu, she had borne a son to Parashara the great rishi. The son was Vyaasa. She said that she would summon him. Bheeshma agreed to her proposal.

Satyavati thought of her first born. Vyaasa hastened to her presence. She welcomed him and told him everything. He said: "You are my mother, the woman who gave me life. I will do anything which you command me to do". He thought for a while and said: "I am quite willing to grant you your heart's desire. I will try and please you. I will take the wives of Vichitraveerya. But it is up to you to make them welcome me. They must not be scared by my appearance and my dark complexion". Satyavati agreed to talk to the girls. She went to Ambika and told her all about the circumstances, that it was her duty to get a child for the sake of the great Kuru House, that she had to welcome the rishi in a proper manner. Ambika agreed to do what she was told. She had no other option.

It was a dark night. Ambika was in her chamber waiting for the coming of the sage Vyaasa. She saw him. So forbidding and terrible was the appearance of the sage that the poor girl was overcome with horror and loathing for this awful-looking man. But she had to go through the dreadful night. She closed her eyes tight and would not respond to the advances of Vyaasa. The night of torture came to an end. Satyavati was waiting anxiously for the coming of Vyaasa. He told her that a strong powerful son would be born to Ambika. But since she closed her eyes throughout the night afraid to look at him, the child would be born blind. Satyavati was greatly disappointed. She was wild with her daughter-in-law. But it was not of any use to look back at something which had already happened. She requested Vyaasa to give a son to the other girl, Ambaalika. Vyaasa agreed to it.

Ambaalika was equally frightened of the rishi. Her blood ran cold at the sight of him. Her body became pale with fright and loathing. The night passed. In the morning Vyaasa told Satyavati that this woman would get a handsome and gentle-natured child. But, he added, he would be white as his mother was when he was being put into her womb. Poor Satyavati did not know what to do. "My son," she said, "the girls have been foolish. Please forgive them for my sake. After her son is born, you must visit Ambika once again. I will chide her in the meantime. You must do this for my sake". "So be it", said Vyaasa and left Hastinapura.

In due course, the two children were born. One was blind and one was white. They were named Dhritarashtra and Pandu. The names were suggested by Vyaasa himself. Satyavati thought that the time had come when Vyaasa should re-visit Ambika. She took her daughter-in-law to task for her previous mistake and told her that it was this which led to her child being born blind. Ambika was told that the rishi would be coming again to her that night.

Ambika could not think of Vyaasa without horror. She made up her mind that she would send her maid to the rishi in the night. Vyaasa met the maid. She was so very attentive to every wish of his that Vyaasa was immensely pleased with her. In the morning he told Satyavati that a wise and good son would be born: that he would be the incarnation of the lord of Dharma. Satyavati's joy was great. "But", said Vyaasa, "the mother of this child will not be your daughter-in-law. She sent her maid to me last night and it is the good fortune of this servant maid to bear the best of my children. I did try my best to help you. But it has not turned out to be a success after all. As for me, please do not ask any more favours of me. For a man who has turned his face away

from all the ties of this earth, it is not right to take a woman more than three times. I agreed to it since you, my mother, commanded me. Please do not summon me again". With these parting words the great Vyaasa went away to the snowy peaks of the Himalaya to resume his penance.

Chapter 9

THE MARRIAGES OF PANDU AND DHRITARASHTRA

The third child was born. He was called Vidura. Again Bheeshma had to take up the task of bringing up the children and ruling the kingdom until Dhritarashtra and Pandu came of age. So passed several years.

The three children were more than sons to their uncle Bheeshma. He taught them everything that was considered essential for kshatriya princes. The first son Dhritarashtra was endowed with unusual strength. Pandu proved to be specially skilled in archery. Vidura was the wisest of the three. Their education was complete. Bheeshma anointed the eldest son Dhritarashtra as the yuvaraja. Pandu, who was proficient in the use of all weapons, was appointed the commander of the army. Vidura was trained to be the minister to the king. Because he was blind, Dhritarashtra could not rule the kingdom. Pandu was ruling it in his name with the assistance of Vidura.

The three boys had reached their youth. The immediate concern of Bheeshma was to find brides for the young men. He heard that the king of Gandhara, Subala by name, had a daughter who was reputed to be a beautiful woman. It was also known that she was very pious. She was famed the world over for her devotion to Sankara. The daughter of the king of Madra Desha was remarkable for her beauty and her gentleness. Bheeshma spoke to Vidura about them. He said: "These two princesses seem to be fit enough to be the queens of our young men. No other king is equal to us in status. Only these two kings are endowed with a good heritage. The daughters of these two kings can become the brides of the Kuru princes." Vidura said: "You are father, mother, guru, everything to us. What you decide for us will be nothing but the best".

Bheeshma sent word to the Gandhara king. He demurred at first, as the prince Dhritarashtra was blind. But Gandhari, the daughter of the king, assured him that she had no objection to marrying the Kuru prince. Her next action was a great deed of self-denial. She was convinced that

she should not be better than her lord in anything. She therefore got a piece of silk and bound up her eyes, refusing to see the world which her husband could not see. The king, Subala, sent his daughter to Hastinapura with his son Sakuni. The marriage was celebrated in the capital city and Sakuni returned to Gandhara after the wedding of his sister.

The king of the Madra kingdom held a swayamvara for his daughter, who chose Pandu as her husband. Pandu eclipsed all the other suitors by the beauty of his person and by his noble looks. Bheeshma was greatly pleased at the thought of the wonderful brides who had come to be the queens of the great Kuru House.

Chapter 10

BORN OF THE SUN

King Soora was one of the Vrishnis. He had a son called Vasudeva and a daughter called Pritha. This king had a cousin called Kuntibhoja who had no children. Soora was very fond of his cousin. He was sorry for him because he was childless. He gave his dear daughter Pritha to Kuntibhoja to be brought up as his own. Pritha was a very beautiful child. Her manners were excellent. She was the most cherished possession of her foster-father. She was given the name Kunti.

Once, the sage Durvasa came to the capital of Kuntibhoja. He was famed throughout the world for his penance and for his temper too! He wanted to spend a few days with the king Kuntibhoja. Kunti had been appointed by her father to attend to the wants of the sage. Entrusted with such a difficult task, Kunti conducted herself admirably. Indeed the sage was so pleased with her that he wanted to grant her a boon. He summoned her to his presence and told her that he would teach her a certain incantation. If she recited it any deva whom she thought of would come to her. She received the gift with the humility becoming the daughter of a king. Durvasa went away.

The child, she was hardly a girl, did not understand what Durvasa meant when he said that the deva whom she invoked would come to her. She was as excited as a child with a new toy. It was early in the morning. Through the eastern window she could see the sun just rising. The east was drenched in the colour of liquid gold. The waters of the river were lapping against the walls of the palace. It was an un-

forgettable scene. The sun and his soft beams, beams which had the coolness of the dawn, and the beautiful river with her path glowing with the red and gold of the rising sun. The scene touched the heart of the young child. She lost herself in the beauty of it. The sun looked gorgeous. Kunti thought how wonderful it would be if the sun could be there by her side. In a flash, she remembered the incantation which the great Durvasa had taught her. Why, if she recited it, the sun would come to her! Yes, that was the way it was said: HE WOULD COME TO HER. The poor child, in blissful ignorance, held her palms together, palms which looked like a lotus bud, and invoked the sun, with the incantation she had learnt.

She opened her eyes. A miracle was happening. Along the watery path of the river, the sun's rays travelled fast. She was blinded by a sudden brilliance. The sun stood by her side. He stood looking at her with a smile of teasing amusement. Kunti was now extremely pleased with the success of the incantation. She smiled a sweet happy smile. She clapped her hands together in excitement and said: "Sage Durvasa said that it would work. I stood looking at you, rising in the east. The scene was so beautiful and you were so beautiful that I wanted you to come here. So I recited the incantation which had been taught me by the sage. You have come! How wonderful!"

The sun was still smiling. He said: "Now that I have come what do you want me to do?"

"Why, nothing," said Kunti. "I just thought of you and imagined how wonderful it will be if you were beside me. That is all".

"That is *not* all", said the god. "It is evident that you did not find any meaning in the words of the sage when he taught you the incantation. He said that 'any god whom you invoked would come to you'. Is that not so?"

"Yes", said Kunti, not following his words at all.

"Can you not see", said the god, "that it means that the god will embrace you and give you a son as beautiful as the god whom you have summoned?"

Kunti was bewildered. She did not know what to do or what to say. "I did not know it", said the frightened child. "I had no idea that the words meant this. Please forgive me this childishness. Please go away and save me from shame". "But that is impossible", said the god. "Once I am summoned by you, I cannot go back until I take you. You must have me. You cannot escape the power of incantation which you have used unthinkingly".

Kunti was beside herself with grief. "I am a young girl", she said. "I am unmarried. What will the world say? What will my

father say? It will break his heart if he comes to know that his daughter is not a virgin any more. Can you not go away?" The sun was charmed by her winning ways. He loved this woman who was hardly a girl. He smiled at her and won her heart with his sweet words and his reassuring smile. He said: "Do not be so frightened, my child. After the child is born, you will again become a virgin as you are now. No one will know of this incident". The young girl was won over by his words and by his beauty. She accepted him without any fear of the consequences.

The sun was ready to depart. He said: "Your son will be born with a Kavacha and a Kundala. He will be the image of me. He will be a great archer. In goodness of heart, no one will equal him. He will be famed throughout the world as the greatest of all givers. He will never be able to refuse anyone anything; not even if I ask him to forbear from giving. He will be a proud and sensitive man. His fame will live in this world as long as the sun and moon move in their appointed orbits". With these words, the sun vanished from her sight.

In course of time, a child was born to Kunti. She did not know what to do with it. Too young to know the joy of motherhood, she was concerned only with the shame of it. She looked out of the window. The river was flowing as placidly as before. Only in the heart of Kunti a storm was brewing. She made up her mind. Wrapping up the child in a piece of silk, she placed it in a box made of wood and carried it to the banks of the river. She set the box afloat on the river and came back to her apartments. From her window she saw the box floating away, further and further away from her. She felt that her heart was choking inside her with a great pain, a great unspeakable longing for that poor helpless mite floating on the heart of that mighty river. Tears flowed from her eyes. Lifting her hand in supplication to the sun, she cried: "My lord, I have done a great injustice to this beautiful child born of you and me. Please guard him. Please do not let any evil befall him".

She spoke to her disappearing child: "May your path be auspicious. The lord of the waters will guard you. You will not die. All the gods in the high heavens will guard you. I will see you some day in the distant future. I will recognize you by your Kavacha and your Kundala. She will be a fortunate woman who will find you and bring you up as her son. She will see you grow up into manhood and she will be the happy woman. But I am the most unfortunate of all women. I will never have you for son. God bless you, my child, my first born".

The laughing girl became a woman all on a sudden. Gone were the days of happy care-free girlhood. Waking or sleeping, she saw just

one thing: a wooden box and a piece of silk; wrapped in the silk, a beautiful child with its Kavacha and Kundala gleaming in the light of the morning sun.

CHAPTER 11

PANDU IS CURSED

Several years passed. Young Kunti was now old enough to be married. She chose the handsome powerful son of the Kuru house, Pandu, as her husband, in a swayamvara. Maadri, the princess of the Madra kingdom, was the other woman who chose Pandu for her lord. Bheeshma made arrangements for the two weddings to take place in a manner suited to their rank and race.

It was the golden age of the Kuru House. Pandu was a good soldier. He went on a tour of the entire Bharatavarsha, intent on subjugating all the kings. He conquered the Dasarnas, Kasi, Anga, Vanga and Kalinga. He descended on the kingdom of Magadha. He was able to defeat the king easily. Since the time when the kings Chitrangada and Vichitraveerya died without leaving any heirs, Bheeshma had the kingdom to manage and all the three small children too. These smaller kingdoms then thought that the glory of the Kuru House was on the wane. Hence, this campaign of Pandu was effective in more ways than one. It re-established the supremacy of the Kuru House. It won fame for Pandu. He was claimed to be the best soldier of his times.

After the campaign was over, Pandu, with his two queens, went to the forest for relaxation. He was a great hunter too. On the southern slopes of the snowy Himalayas, he spent many happy days with his two young wives. The dwellers in the forests mistook them for devas who had come down to the earth for amusement. It was a happy time for them. In after years, it was the memory of these days filled with pleasure, that kept Kunti alive.

In that forest lived a rishi and his wife. The two were intensely in love with each other. The rishi wanted to enjoy the pleasures of love without any restraint. Since only animals are able to love without any thought of the openness of it, the rishi and his wife changed themselves into a couple of deer. They were always together. One day, when the deer were lost to everything in the pleasure of coming together, Pandu saw them. They were excellent targets. The hunter in him made him forget the law that no two animals which are together in the

embrace of love should be disturbed. He took his bow and arrow and aimed at the couple. In a moment the male deer fell to the ground, hurt fatally. It addressed the king in a human voice and said: "Born in a family known the world over for its righteousness, how could you have done this sinful thing? You saw that we were lost in the embrace of love. How could you have the heart to disturb us? I am a rishi and this is my wife. We were so happy together. In after years this heinous action of yours will cost you your life. When, overcome with love, you approach your wife, death will come to you even as it did to me". All the pleadings of Pandu were of no avail. The angry rishi would not relent and there was no hope of escaping the fate that awaited him. The rishi died and his wife too along with him.

With a heavy heart, the poor unfortunate prince wended his way to the ashrama, chiding himself for his thoughtlessness. Fate's ways are indeed mysterious. At a touch, it changes the entire future of a man. Pandu was the happiest of men, with nothing to worry him. He was the uncrowned king of the entire kingdom of the Kurus. At the peak of his glory, he was laid low like a green tree struck down by lightning. Pandu lost all interest in everything. He did not wish to return to his kingdom. He told his wives that he had made up his mind to spend the rest of his life in the forest. Knowing the reason behind this decision and the cause of the king's despondency, they did not speak a word. The fire of self-reproach had burnt Pandu free of all worldly aspirations. He wanted nothing else than peace, peace which could be attained only by living as the rishis did. He made up his mind that his next conquest would be over the self. This would be his greatest conquest. He set a law unto himself. He said: "From now onwards, I will be a different man. Neither pleasure nor sorrow can hurt me. Praise and censure I will treat with equal indifference. The opposites will find me unaffected by them. I will not love this life of mine, nor will I hate it. I will do penance, not by sitting under the tree with my eyes closed, but by mentally renouncing all the worldly things". He collected all his retinue round him. Giving away all his belongings to them he said: "Please go back to Hastinapura and saluting my dear mother Ambaalika and my grandmother Satyavati and my revered uncle Bheeshma, tell them about the course of life I have planned out for myself. I have no intention of coming back to the city". Kunti and Maadri discarded all their jewels and costly silks and gave them all to the departing messengers.

Hearing about the renunciation of Pandu, the city of Hastinapura was sunk in woe. Bheeshma was very much grieved at the unfortunate happenings. As for Ambaalika, her eyes rained tears incessantly. It was not possible for anyone to console her. Bheeshma felt that the

burden was once again placed on his shoulders. With the powerful Pandu as the commander and ruler of the kingdom and with the wise and gentle Vidura as the mentor of the blind king Dhritarashtra, Bheeshma thought that the weight of the kingdom had been lifted off his shoulders. But now it was evident that his short respite was over. He had to rule the kingdom again, he knew not for how long. The ice which had entered his heart on that unforgettable day when he renounced the world and the joys of the world for the sake of his father, hardened further. Bheeshma felt that he was impervious to all hurts.

CHAPTER 12

THE BIRTH OF THE PANDAVAS AND DURYODHANA

Pandu spent several years in the forest. He was happy in his own way since he had renounced all things that threatened to cause unhappiness. However, as time passed, a new worry entered his heart. He wanted children. He heard that a man with no sons was doomed to hell. His worry was immense. One day he was talking about it to Kunti. He could not take her; that was certain. So he asked her if she would, for the sake of his salvation, produce a child for him with a rishi for companion, as his mother had done. Kunti was not for it. She was angry with him. She said: "My lord, you are my lord and master. I chose you as my husband long ago. I will be with you in heaven or in hell. When you die I will die with you and after death this curse cannot hold. We will get children then. Please do not try to coax me to do something which I cannot bring myself to do".

Pandu could not rest in peace. Days and nights he spent in misery, thinking only of his unborn children. Finally, taking pity on the king whom she loved immensely, Kunti said: "My lord, I can cure you of your depression. I have it in my power to do what your heart desires". She told the king of her girlhood days: of the visit of Durvasa to her father's court and of the boon granted by Durvasa. The king's joy was immense. He talked it over with her. He decided that a son born of Dharma would indeed be a worthy son. "He will be a son", said the king, "who will be remembered in aftertimes. The personification of Dharma himself, my son will uphold my name for all times."

In that picturesque forest garden of Satasringa, Kunti invoked the Lord of Dharma. On an auspicious day when all the stars and planets were favourable, Kunti gave birth to a son born of Dharma. A voice

from the heavens proclaimed that this child was the perfect image of righteousness and for this quality in him he would be famed throughout the world. The child was named Yudhishthira. Pandu was very happy. A year later he asked Kunti to bear him another son. This time he wanted the father to be Vayu, the most powerful of the devas. "When righteousness is supported by strength, nothing can withstand the combination," said the king. "So be it," said Kunti. Vayu was invoked, and a beautiful strong son was born to Kunti. The voice from the heavens now proclaimed: "This child will be the most powerful and the most affectionate child". The son was called Bheemasena.

Pandu, now the father of two sons, was not satisfied. He asked Kunti to give him another son. "Summon Indra," said Pandu. "A son born of the lord of the heavens will indeed be the realization of all my dreams. A son born of Indra will be very righteous. He will be a great man. He will be a hero, invincible. You will be the mother of the greatest of all heroes". Again she said: "So be it". Kunti invoked Indra and he gave her a son. The voice from the heavens now said: "This child will win for Pandu imperishable fame. He will be the conqueror of the entire world. There will be none like him". Indra came to Pandu and said: "This son of mine will be the conqueror of the entire world. Your son Yudhishthira will perform the great Rajasuya and Asvamedha yagas with this son of mine by his side. My son is the other half of Vishnu. He is Nara. Krishna, the son of Vasudeva and Devaki, is Narayana. Because of these two men, the earth will be cleansed of all the poisons which are hurting her". With these words Indra went away. The son was called Arjuna.

There is an avarice which is greater than love of money. It is the desire for sons. Pandu was the father of three sons. Still he was not satisfied. He asked Kunti to give him another son. She refused, saying: "You were so eager to have sons. Hence I agreed. Now, even after three sons have been born, if I get more, Dharma will be destroyed. Desperate acts are allowed only three times at the most. I will not try again". Pandu said: "You are right. But think of Maadri. She has no son. Can you not teach her the incantation and help her to get a son?" Kunti was quite willing to do it. She taught the invocation to Maadri. Maadri invoked the Asvini kumaras: the heavenly twins. They gave her two sons. These sons of Maadri were more beautiful than the other three. The voice from the heavens spoke once more: "These two will be the most handsome men in the world. They will be famed for their good qualities, their devotion, their bravery and their wisdom". The sons of Maadri were called Nakula and Sahadeva.

The rishis in the valley of Satasringa were the officiating priests for the naming ceremony, and later they were responsible for the earlier

education of the young princes. They were almost the children of all the rishis of the valley. Years ago, when the curse had descended on Pandu and he retired to the forest, the Vrishnis, the cousins and brothers of Kunti, were very unhappy. Now, when news reached them that Pandu was the father of five sons, they were immensely pleased. Vasudeva, the brother of Kunti, sent costly gifts and clothes through his family priest Kasyapa. This priest was asked to perform the rites necessary for young kshatriya princes. He stayed on and performed their upanayanas.

In the forest lived Suka, the son of Sayyati. There was no archer to equal him. He was performing penance in the valley of Satasringa. He volunteered to train the youngsters in the use of arms. Because of the excellent training given by the great rishi, the young princes became proficient in the use of weapons. Bheema was good with the mace, Yudhishthira with the javelin, the twins with the sword. Arjuna became a good archer. He could use both his hands with equal ease. Pleased with his skill, Suka said that his disciple had become the equal of his master. In his pleasure he made a gift of his bow to Arjuna as a mark of his appreciation.

On the same day as Bheema was born, Gandhari's eldest son was born. He was born during the night, and was called Duryodhana. Dhritarashtra was very pleased. He summoned Vidura to his presence and said: "I hear that a son has already been born to Pandu. He is a year older than my son. I have a fear that he, being the elder, will become the rightful heir to the throne, the throne of the Pauravas. Do you think my guess is right? I am also upset by something else. The moment my child was born, certain omens were evident, omens which are not auspicious. I do not understand the reason for it". Vidura looked grave. He said: "My brother, these omens prophesy that your son will be the cause of the destruction of the entire world". The king was shocked by these words. He said: "How can I avert the calamity?" Vidura said: "There is only one way. If you sacrifice this child for the good of humanity, the evil can be averted. You must put him to death. The wise say that, for the sake of the family, *one* can be abandoned, the family may be abandoned for the sake of the village, the village for the sake of the community; and everything, even this world, may be abandoned for the sake of saving the soul. My advice to you is to abandon this child which spells ruin to the world". Poor Dhritarashtra could not do it. Duryodhana was his first born. He could not take the advice of Vidura. In course of time, he was the father of a hundred and one sons and a daughter called Dussala. The king was happy. He buried all his misgivings in the joy of fatherhood.

CHAPTER 13

THE DEATH OF PANDU

Pandu spent fifteen happy years with his sons. Time passed. One day Kunti had gone with the sons to a neighbouring ashrama. Pandu was alone. It was a beautiful day. It was spring time. All the trees had dressed themselves with beautiful flowers. The air was laden with the perfume of these blossoms. The forest garden of Satasringa was that day a fitting stage for the act of love. In that place, made beautiful and dreamy by the magic touch of Vasanta, the lord of spring, the friend and helpmate of the god of love, the king saw Maadri. She was a very beautiful woman. Her dark form draped in crimson silk, she stood before the king enchanting him with her loveliness. Pandu was overcome with a desperate desire to take her. Eighteen years had passed without his having tasted the joys of a woman's embrace, and Maadri was enchantingly beautiful. His desire was too strong. He forgot all about the curse. Maadri tried desperately to resist his advances. Kunti would have guarded him against this danger. But she was not there. Maadri ran hither and thither like a frightened deer. But Pandu was too powerful. He caught her in his arms and, despite her words of warning and her remonstrances, he took her. The next moment he fell down dead.

The cry of Maadri reached the ears of Kunti. With the five young boys she rushed to the spot. Maadri said: "Something terrible has happened. Leave the children and come here, alone". Kunti saw her husband lying dead. She turned her entire wrath on the poor unfortunate Maadri. She said: "How could you, knowing the curse, allow this? Could you not have reminded him of it?" Maadri told her all that had happened. Kunti realized that fate was too powerful. Her grief burned her frame. She fell down senseless on the ground. Maadri took up the body of the dead king, dressed him in his kingly robes and laid him on the bed. She made Kunti get up. Kunti looked on the face of Pandu. A beautiful smile lit up the face of the dead king. Placing her face on his, Kunti gave way to her grief.

By then the rishis of the valley of Satasringa had assembled there. They looked on the scene with pity in their hearts. Yudhishthira and his brothers stood by, stunned by the calamity which had overtaken them. Yudhishthira lamented their fate with tears in his eyes. He said: "We are now orphans. Fate's ways are, indeed, terrible. How

can we, so young, live in this world of sin without your kind hands to guide us? From today, we are lost. We have no friends, no one to take care of us". The children were standing round him weeping tears of pain. The scene was pitiable. The rishis took the children apart and tried to console them.

Both Kunti and Maadri wanted to ascend the funeral pyre with Pandu. The rishis said: "You are both mothers. It is your duty to stay with your children and take care of them. They are now sunk in the depths of despair. It is not fitting that you, their dear mothers, should now leave them and make them orphans in the full sense of the word. We will take you both to the city of Hastinapura. We are sure that the blind king Dhritarashtra will not be as fond of these children as he ought to be. It is your duty as mothers, to guard your sons, the future rulers of the world".

The words of the rishis found no response in the heart of Maadri. She was bent on only one thing: her death with the husband who had to die because of her. "He wanted me", she said. "Before he was even able to satisfy himself he died. I have got to go to him and satisfy him. I must die with him". She was delirious with the pain in her heart. She looked at Kunti and said: "My dear sister, you are the elder and the wiser of us two. I will never be able to guard the children as you can. My sons, born out of your kindness, are really your sons. You are great enough to be the mother of five sons. You are the only person who can guard them. You have your cousins, the Vrishnis, to help you. You must help me to realise my dream. I will not, I cannot, live in this world without my lord. I will ascend the funeral pyre with him. You must agree to make this sacrifice for me. You must live for the sake of these sons of yours. You will see them rulers of this entire world. Life will have its compensations for you. I pray to you, grant me this my wish".

Kunti agreed. The rishis too thought that it was the right thing to do. Maadri called the children to her side and spoke to them words full of love and pain. She said: "Kunti is your mother. I have been just the nurse-maid. You are all the sons of Kunti. You will be the five KAUNTEYAS. Yudhishthira will be the father and you four will be his sons. Never displease him in any manner, on any account. I am leaving you all in his hands. Yudhishthira, my son, you will be lord of this earth. I will look on you from above and bless you".

Maadri took leave of everyone. She fell at the feet of Kunti. Kunti blessed Maadri with the words: "I grant you permission to follow our lord. You will meet him in heaven and be with him for ever and ever. Your name will always be remembered with love and tears

by the world of men. Farewell, my sister. You can go in peace". Tears ran down her cheeks as she said this. Maadri, with great joy suffusing her face, ascended the pyre. Yudhishthira, the eldest son, applied the sacred fire with streaming eyes.

It was all over. The residents of Satasringa conferred and decided on the future course of action. They said that the best thing to do would be to proceed to Hastinapura with Kunti and the five sons of Pandu. There, they would leave the princes in the care of Bheeshma and the king Dhritarashtra. It was the rightful home of the princes, now that Pandu was dead. With swimming eyes, Kunti bade adieu to the forest Satasringa where she had spent so many happy years with Pandu and Maadri. It was all the past now. A new chapter was to begin. No one knew what fate held in store for them in Hastinapura. The rishis, with Kunti and the five sons of Pandu, set out for the beautiful city. The journey into the unknown had begun.

Chapter 14

TOWARDS HASTINAPURA

The Pandava princes and their mother, escorted by the rishis of Satasringa, reached Hastinapura. The citizens were amazed at the sight. News reached Bheeshma and Dhritarashtra about the arrival of these people. They went to the gates of the city to receive the strange guests, a group of rishis, a woman whose sad eyes haunted everyone, and five young men whose beauty and princeliness caught every eye.

Dhritarashtra, Bheeshma, Baahlika the brother of Santanu, his son Somadatta, the wise Vidura, Satyavati, Ambaalika, Ambika, Gandhari and the others, with a big retinue, went to the gates of the city. A memorable sight met their eyes. They saw Kunti with the five young princes, like an Arani with five flames leaping out of it. The rishis were adored by the Kaurava elders. Then they spoke: "You are all aware of the fact that the great Kuru prince Pandu, having renounced the pleasures of the world, was living with his wives Kunti and Maadri on the picturesque hills of Satasringa. He was dearly loved by all of us. During his stay with us Pandu became the father of five sons. Three of them, this young man by name Yudhishthira, this Bheema and this child Arjuna are the sons of Kunti, born of Dharma, Vayu and Indra. Those two boys who are standing near Kunti are Nakula and Sahadeva born to Maadri. They are the sons of the Aśvini twins.

When Yudhishthira was fifteen, Pandu performed all the religious rites for these young men. Now, seventeen days back, Pandu was gathered to his forefathers. We performed all the funeral rites. The queen Maadri accompanied him on the pyre. We have brought these young men, the future hopes of your Kuru House, and their mother. It is up to you, Bheeshma and Dhritarashtra to take up the guardianship of these fatherless children." With these words the rishis went away.

The entire city was sunk in woe. Bheeshma was speechless with sorrow. He was shocked and pained at the thought that he could no longer see his young nephew Pandu who left them all years back. Dhritarashtra was grieved at the loss of his brother and companion. Memories came crowding back, memories of the days of his childhood and boyhood, when Pandu with his love and gentleness made him forget that he was blind. Tears choked him. Ambaalika was struck senseless. Her grief was inconsolable. They all returned to the palace. Dhritarashtra asked Vidura to make arrangements for a royal mourning and funeral rites to be performed for the dead Pandu in a manner fitting to the son of the Kuru House. The great Vyaasa came to preside over the function.

Afterwards, when it was all over, Vyaasa approached his mother Satyavati and said: "Mother, the happy days are over. Terrible. dreadful times are in store for the House of the Kurus. Every day will be laden with sin. The world is well past her youth. Another few years, and sin will prevail in the mind of your dear grandson Dhritarashtra and his sons. There will be nothing but annihilation. Mother, you have not the strength of mind to watch your great-grand-children destroy each other; yes, destroy each other in a great war. Why do you tarry here? Retire to the forest and turn your back on this world". "So be it", said Satyavati. She called Ambika and Ambaalika and told them that she was going away to the forest and asked them if they were willing to go with her. They were only too willing to go away from the city and try to forget their pain.

Indeed, fate had not been kind to these three women. They had been the chosen targets for disappointments and heart aches. They were only too happy to go away from that dreadful city which held so many painful memories for them. Satyavati thought of her futile life; the few years of happiness which she spent with Santanu. Even those years were not quite happy for her, because she knew that her happiness was built on the unhappiness of Bheeshma. Then came the death of her lord, followed hard upon by the death of both her sons. Then came the birth of the three children Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Vidura. Disappointments followed one another, and now this dreadful prophecy of

Vyaasa that there was nothing but annihilation in store for the great Kuru House. She was grateful to her son for the respite he suggested.

Her daughters-in-law were only too happy, eager, to escape from a city which had never given them any happiness. From the moment Bheeshma brought them there by force, they had been just pawns in a game played by their mother-in-law. They were made to marry Vichitraveerya. Then followed the tragic story of their beloved sister Amba. They could never get over the pain of it. A few years of happiness with their lord. Then came the tragic death of Vichitraveerya and their months of loneliness. This was broken by the commands of their mother-in-law. They had to bear sons to uphold the name of the family. The dreadful experiences they had when Vyaasa was called. The children which proved to be such disappointments to the queen mother whose ambition was immense. The two women, still toys in the hands of Satyavati, agreed to go away to the forest with her. Ambaalika was almost dead when her son died. She was grateful for the peace that the forest promised. They wanted just to forget. There is one thing more powerful than all the weapons of death; it is unwillingness to live. It baffles death as nothing else can. When one is no longer interested in the events of the world, the state is worse than death. The three women, Satyavati, Ambika and Ambaalika, had reached that stage. To them nothing mattered any longer. They set out willingly for the forest, in search of peace to soothe their bruised hearts.

Just before setting out for the forest, the three queens took farewell of all the members of the royal household. Satyavati sent for Bheeshma. She told him about her decision. He was very unhappy. She was the link between him and his dear departed father.

"Why, mother, why should you leave me and go away? Will you not stay behind and help me to bear the burden of sorrow?"

Satyavati said: "My son, I will not stay. Vyaasa told me that there is nothing but annihilation in store for the house of the Kurus. I thought that I was a brave woman. But I am not. I cannot see the destruction of the Kuru family. I will escape into the forest. I am firm".

"Annihilation!" said Bheeshma. "Tell me more about this prophecy of Vyaasa".

Satyavati told him.

Bheeshma's face was white and drawn with pain. He said: "I find that I am also willing to play the coward. My father has granted me a boon. He said that I can die when I please. There is nothing left to live for, mother. I will also summon death and go back to the arms of my mother".

"No, you shall not," said Satyavati. 'That is the reason for my calling you. I leave these youngsters in your hands. It is up to you to see that the House of the Kurus is firmly established in this world. You must not dream of retiring from this world until this duty is performed. Once I commanded you to do something for me and you refused. This time, you cannot. I command you to guard these children".

Bheeshma bent his head down in silent consent.

Thus they parted: Satyavati, to find the peace that had been denied her all these years; Bheeshma with the burden of life imposed on him till fate thought fit to relieve him of its crushing weight.

CHAPTER 15

JEALOUSY : ITS FIRST SPROUTS

For the first time in their lives the Pandava princes tasted the life of luxury that was theirs by birthright. They were all youngsters: the Pandavas and the sons of Dhritarashtra. The palace gardens were filled with the voices of the boys at play, and Bheeshma spent a few days of happiness listening to the voices of his grandsons.

It was then that evil was born in the heart of Duryodhana. Bheema was a wild lad. He enjoyed teasing the other boys. He was the strongest of the lot. In any kind of fight he would be the winner. In boxing, in wrestling, in any game of strength, he was able to defeat the sons of Dhritarashtra. If they were on top of a tree, his favourite game was to shake the tree by the roots and make the boys fall from the tree like so many fruits. They resented this. Bheema was bubbling over with the energy, or rather the excess of energy, that was his inheritance from his father.

Taking defeat and humiliation with a smiling face is a form of hypocrisy which we are able to develop as we grow older. It is entirely absent when we are young. A defeated child will always shout and storm at the winner. This is a characteristic which we all know. "Being a sport", as the idiom goes, is not a natural reaction of the child. We develop it, as we develop poise, only when we grow older. The sons of Dhritarashtra were true to nature and they resented this supremacy of Bheema. Bheema too, in all fairness to his cousins, was a bit of a bully. He enjoyed teasing the other boys and humiliating them. It was all very childish. But the heart of Duryodhana, the young boy, was full of anger and sullen hatred and jealousy. He hated his

cousin Bheema with all his little might and heart. The poor boy thought out ways and means of avenging this extreme humiliation.

He was a spoilt child. Till now he was the sole master of the entire palace. He was, too, the sole heir to the affection of his grandfather Bheeshma. This intrusion of the cousins was something he did not bargain for. Here were rivals who were being petted by his beloved grandfather who had been so very fond of him till now. He was wild with jealousy. Bheema was a rival who was getting the better of him in everything. Any other child, under similar circumstances, would have reacted in the same way. "I wish he were dead" is a common form of expression of an angry child. Duryodhana too wished that Bheema were dead.

But here the parallel ceases. Ordinary children would have outgrown this stage. But Duryodhana was not an ordinary child. His father was selfish and avaricious. Duryodhana inherited these qualities. He thought far ahead. He did not want these cousins of his to prosper. He thought that with the death of Bheema his future as the king of the country would be reassured. It was here, at this pliable stage, that Sakuni entered the stage—Sakuni, the uncle of Duryodhana and his evil mentor. He fanned the spark of hatred in the heart of Duryodhana till it became an all-consuming flame. There was place for no other feeling in the heart of the young prince except hatred for the Pandavas in general and for Bheema in particular. Sleep left his eyes and he was unhappy.

Sakuni and Duryodhana hatched a plot to destroy Bheema. The young boys went to the banks of the river Ganga. They spent the whole day there playing various games. It was a picnic. When evening came on, Bheema was very tired and hungry. Duryodhana took him inside the tent and himself fed him on the choicest kinds of food. Bheema was simple and without guile. He could never see through the actions of others. He ate his food not knowing that Duryodhana had mixed Kalakuta, the deadliest of poisons, with it. Tired out, young Bheema lay down and promptly fell into a deep sleep. The sleeping form of Bheema was bound up with strong creepers. Duryodhana then flung him into the waters of the Ganga where there were placed many snakes spitting deadly poison.

The return to the city was being planned. Yudhishthira looked everywhere for Bheema. He was nowhere to be seen. Yudhishthira thought that perhaps he had already reached the city. He went home in a hurry and asked his mother: "Mother, is Bheema here?" Kunti was surprised. "No, he has not come back", said the mother. Looking at the face of Yudhishthira, she was frightened. He told her that

he was nowhere to be seen. The four boys returned to the banks of the river and searched for their brother everywhere. "Bheema! Bheema!" they called out to him. Only the echoes of their voices reached them. Their search was fruitless. They returned home and told their mother that he was not to be seen anywhere. Frightened, Kunti sent for Vidura and told him that Bheema was missing. They told him everything. Kunti said: "Duryodhana does not look on my son with love. I have a fear that he has killed my child when he was sleeping". Vidura comforted her. He said: "Do not worry, my dear sister. It is up to you to protect the other four. If Duryodhana knows that we suspect him, he will try to kill the others also. It has been said by the rishis that your sons will be long-lived. Do not show your feelings. I am sure Bheema is safe. He will come back to you soon. Possess your heart in patience and do not let Duryodhana know that you suspect him". After these words of comfort, Vidura went away.

Bheema, who had been flung into the river with his limbs tied with the creepers, still slept on. Suddenly he felt something stinging him. The snakes had begun their work. They all, together and one by one, began to sting him all over. A strange thing happened. The poison of the snakes proved to be the antidote for the terrible poison which had been eaten by Bheema. He woke up and began to kill the snakes. Some of them were able to escape and they went to the nether regions. They reached the abode of Vasuki, their master. They said: "Here is a man: or perhaps he is the king of serpents. A thousand serpents have stung him. It only woke him from a deep sleep. Now he has broken all bonds and he is bent on killing all of us. It is but meet that you should see him". Vasuki was led by his myrmidons to the place where Bheema was. Vasuki recognised him to be Bheema, the son of Kunti, and embraced him. He told his minister: "Give him riches and jewels to his heart's content. I am very pleased with him". The minister replied: "I would like to make a suggestion. He is a prince. Jewels and riches will be of no use to him. Why should we not feed him with our elixir which gives great strength?" Vasuki was pleased with the suggestion of his minister. He sat Bheema facing the east and gave him a bowl full of the elixir. Bheema quaffed it at a single draught. The entire assembly was amazed. Vasuki called for more and told Bheema: "Drink your fill. The more you drink the stronger will you be. Each bowl will give you the strength of a thousand elephants". Bheema emptied eight bowls of the divine elixir and went to sleep.

Bheema slept for eight days. On the eighth day he got up. He was fed with the divine food of the Naga king and was brought to the surface of the river. He found himself in the place where they

had all camped. He returned home to his mother and brothers. He was greeted with tears of joy by all of them. Kunti could not contain herself. She was so happy. Yudhishthira was able to speak only after a few moments of stunned silence. He was very fond of Bheema and this week was a week of torture for him. Bheema embraced all of them and pacified his mother who was now weeping without any restraint. With all the five round him, Bheema told them about his strange experience. Vidura came and heard the story. He advised them to be careful about the hatred of Duryodhana. The Pandavas were shocked at the fact that there was such a thing as hatred and in so young a heart. They were so good. They could not imagine that hatred could blind a man to such an extent.

Duryodhana saw the hated Bheema alive and well. He was happy for the last few days and now the sight of Bheema was a great shock. He was surprised at the miracle that had saved Bheema. He had been so sure of the success of his plot. Sakuni was equally amazed. Duryodhana's hatred was greater now. But he had to be quiet, because he knew that the Pandavas knew.

CHAPTER 16

ENTER DRONA

Bheeshma appointed Kripa to undertake the education of the princes. Kripa was well versed in the use of arms. He had been brought up by Santanu who found him and his twin sister in the forest one day when he had gone out there for his hunt. Taking pity on them he brought them home. He called them Kripa and Kripi. Their father was the great Gautama. Kripa was very much interested in the use of arms. He learnt it. Bheeshma thought that he was the right person to be the tutor to the young princes. The sons of Dhritarashtra, the sons of Pandu, the young princes from the house of Vrishni, Bhoja and Andhaka came to Hastinapura to learn archery and other warlike arts from Kripa. When they were proficient enough, Bheeshma thought that further training from a more capable teacher was essential. He was on the look-out for such a teacher.

One day the boys were all playing with a ball. All of a sudden, the ball fell into a well that was near by. The boys stood confused. Their game was made to stop in the middle. A man was standing there, watching them. Seeing their confusion he came near them and said:

"Evidently you do not know the use of a bow and arrow. If you did, then there would not have been any reason for this helplessness of yours". "But we *do* know the use of a bow and arrows sir," said the boys. Yudhishthira came forward and said: "In fact, our tutor is the great Kripa. But then, what has that to do with our present predicament? How can a bow and arrows help us to regain our ball? We do not understand!" "I will show you", said the stranger. He removed a gem-set ring from his little finger and dropped it into the well. While the amazed boys looked on, the man shot an arrow into the well. The boys leaned across the parapet of the well and saw that the arrow had pierced the ball after passing through the ring. The man sent another arrow which pierced the one that had been shot before. A third pierced the second, a fourth the third, and so on, until there was formed a rope of arrows. Pulling it out he gave the ball to the boys and placed the ring on his finger. The boys were just thunder-struck. This was a thing which they had never seen. Overcome with admiration for this stranger, they said: "Please let us know who you are". The stranger smiled and said: "Go to your grandfather and tell him all that happened here. He will know who I am".

The boys rushed pell-mell to the palace of Bheeshma and told him about the wonderful man. Bheeshma knew at once who he was. He realized that the newcomer was Drona, the husband of Kripi. He had learnt archery from the great Bhargava. He was the son of Bharadwaja, the great sage. Bheeshma felt that a fit tutor had at last come for the young men. He hurried to the presence of Drona and welcomed him with due honour to Hastinapura.

CHAPTER 17

DRONA AND DRUPADA

Drona was the son of Bharadwaja. In his childhood days he had for his companion Drupada, the prince of the Panchala kingdom. They were very good friends. Once, in a moment of affection, Drupada told Drona: "I am, indeed, very fond of you. I do not want our friendship to end here, in the ashrama. I am the heir to the throne of the Panchalas. When I become king I will take you with me and we can be friends for life".

Years passed. Drona married Kripi, the daughter of Saradwata or Gautama. A son was born to them. He was called Aswatthama.

Drona's ambition was to become the greatest archer of the time. He went to the great Bhargava who had toured the world twenty-one times, destroying the kshatriyas. He received Drona with affection and said: "What can I do for you?"

The newcomer said: 'I am Drona, the son of Bharadwaja. I have come to you in my desire for wealth". "I have no wealth", said Bhargava. "I have given away all my earthly belongings to Kasyapa. Only this my body can be called my own. What can I give you, poor as I am?"

Drona smiled and said: "My lord, I want the wealth that you have with you. You are a pastmaster in the art of archery. I want to be your disciple and learn it". "That is easy", said Bhargava. "I will accept you as my pupil".

Having acquired mastery over all the astras, Drona came home. Aswatthama was then a young child. They were in extreme poverty. Once the child came to his mother and said: "Mother, all my friends talk about something called Milk. I want milk. They say that there is nothing to equal it in taste, except the elixir of the devas. I want milk, mother". The poor woman did not know what to do. She could not satisfy the child. When Drona heard about it he became very unhappy. But suddenly he remembered the days of his friendship with the Panchala prince, Drupada. He told Kripi: "Listen, Kripi. I have a friend by name Drupada. He is now the king of the Panchalas. He was my dear friend in the ashrama where we studied together. He has promised to share his riches with me. Let us hasten to Panchala. It will be the end of our poverty". The three of them set out to the country called Panchala.

Drona went to the court of Drupada and asked for an audience. He entered the court and said: "I am Drona. I am your boyhood friend. I heard that you have become king. So I came. Do you remember the words you spoke when we were together in the ashrama? You said that you wanted our friendship to last for ever. You even offered to share your kingdom with me. I do not want your land or your riches. But I have come to you as a friend. It is up to you to keep me with you. Let us always be together".

Drupada had changed. He was not the same person who spoke so sweetly to the brahmin in those old days. His riches and the fact that he was a king had made him proud. Drunk with power, he laughed at Drona. He said: "It makes me laugh to think that you, a poor brahmin whom I befriended in my student days, should claim friendship with me. Do you not know that friendship is possible between equals and only between equals? Only two poor men can be friends

and only two rich men can be friends. But this unusual friendship that you speak about is only a dream. It can never be a reality. Please go away from here and do not come back to me, pestering me with your tales of some fabulous promise of long long ago".

The insulted brahmin stood silent for a few moments. Abruptly, without a word, he left the court of the arrogant king. In that one moment when he stood there in the court, silent, was decided his future action: REVENGE. Revenge must be taken on this Drupada who has been so blinded with pride that he has forgotten his promise. The man who had insulted him, as he would any beggar, must suffer for it. Drona decided to train a young kshatriya in archery; through him he would realize his dream. He turned his steps towards Hastinapura. That was where his wife's brother, Kripa, was living. He had heard too, that Kripa was the tutor to the young princes of the Kuru House. He hoped that Hastinapura would lead him to his goal.

When he was on the outskirts of the city, he saw the young princes of the Kuru house. It was then that he rescued the ball for them. Bheeshma came later and welcomed him to the city. Drona was very pleased with the reception of Bheeshma.

Drona told him all about the insult he had suffered at the hands of the proud king of the Panchalas. He told him too about his desire for revenge. Bheeshma said: "You have come to the proper place. I have grand-children running into hundreds, who are eager to learn archery. I will be honoured and greatly relieved if you can take up the task of training them up to be kshatriyas in the real sense of the word". Drona was only too eager to oblige. Bheeshma called all the children and entrusted them to Drona and said: "From today they are yours. Yours is the task of bringing them up to be men, real men".

Several years passed in the education of the young princes. All of them were good at the use of arms. But Arjuna became the favourite of Drona. His love for archery, his incessant practice, his extreme patience, his devotion to his studies and to his guru, and his lovable nature won the heart of Drona. It was soon an established fact that Arjuna was dearer to his guru than even the guru's own son Aswatthama. It must be said in defence of Drona that Arjuna won his heart because he was the perfect student. His concentration was admirable. He would practise all the night through, very often, to master a certain lesson. Drona was so pleased with him that once he told him: "I have never seen an archer like you. I promise to make you the greatest archer in this world". Arjuna's joy was immense.

Once, while Drona was bathing in the river Ganga, he was attacked by a crocodile. It caught hold of his leg. He sent out a cry: "Save

me, save me from this crocodile". He could have extricated himself easily. But he wanted to test the prowess of his students. So he called out for help. Even before his words were out of his lips, Arjuna, with his quick and sharp arrows, killed the crocodile which was submerged in the water. Drona was very happy. In his extreme pleasure Drona taught the great astra called Brahmasirsha to Arjuna. He told him how to despatch it and how to withdraw it. He gave Arjuna a word of warning. He said: "This astra is too strong to be used on ordinary mortals. If it is aimed at poor ineffectual persons, it will destroy the entire world. If there is a person who is either a rakshasa or a perverted deva who causes great havoc among men then, and only then, should this be used". Arjuna accepted it with great humility and gratitude.

Chapter 18

EKALAVYA, THE NISHADA

There came one day to Drona, a dark young boy. He came near the acharya when no one was about. He fell at the feet of the great brahmin. He said: "My lord, I have come to you to learn archery. Please accept me as your pupil". Drona liked his manners. He looked at him kindly and said: "Who are you?" The youngster replied: "I am Ekalavya. I am the son of Hiranyadhanus, the king of the nishadas". Drona would not take him as his pupil, as he was not a kshatriya but a nishada. He told him gently: "My dear child, I cannot take you as my pupil. I have undertaken to train these kshatriya princes. You will not be welcome here. I like you. But I cannot take you". Disappointed and broken-hearted, the young nishada boy went back to the forest whence he came, all the way to Hastinapura. He bore no ill-will towards Drona, but he was unhappy.

Back in the forest, he made a figure of Drona out of mud with his own hands. He called this image his guru. Daily he would worship this image and then practise on his bow. In a short while he found that he was able to learn archery quickly. Such is the magnetism of desire. All one's conscious and unconscious thoughts are drawn towards this one desire, and all one's actions become only echoes of this voice of desire. It was even so with Ekalavya. His love for archery and his love for his guru who refused to take him as his pupil, not because he would not but because he could not, these two

loves made him think of archery and only archery. He wanted to master the art. Soon he was an adept in it.

Once the Kuru princes and the Pandavas went to the forest on a picnic. The Pandavas had taken a dog with them. This dog had wandered right into the heart of the forest. It came upon a strange man. He was dressed in the skin of a leopard and he walked like a leopard. Looking at him, the dog thought that it was a wild animal. It began to bark furiously. Ekalavya, the nishada, for it was he, could not resist the temptation to seal the mouth of the dog with his arrows. The long face of the dog was covered with arrows. Seven arrows had been interlaced and woven so skilfully that the dog could not open his mouth. He ran away from the spot and reached the camp of the Pandavas. The contraption about its mouth amazed everyone. Drona and his students admired the skill of the unknown archer: a man who had created a poem with his arrows. Some of them went in search of the stranger. Finally they found him. They asked him who he was. He said: "I am Ekalavya. I am the son of Hiranyadhanus, the king of the nishadas". When they asked him how he was able to work such wonders with his bow and arrows, Ekalavya smiled a proud smile and said: "That is because I am the disciple of the great Drona". They all came back to the camp and told Drona about this. Arjuna, the favourite of Drona, was not pleased with this at all. He went to his acharya and said: "You have promised to me that you will make me the greatest archer in this world. Now it seems as though you have given that promise to someone else. In fact, he is already the greatest archer in the world".

Drona went with Arjuna to see this Ekalavya. He did not remember him at all. He found him dressed in the skin of a leopard. He stood with his bow and arrows in his hand. Ekalavya saw his guru. He rushed to him and fell at his feet. His tears washed the feet of his beloved guru. Drona was charmed by him. He asked him when he became the pupil of Drona. Ekalavya was only too happy to relate the entire story to him. He was so naive and unaffected that Drona could not help loving him. Ekalavya did not even seem to realize how great an archer he was. Drona paused for a moment. With great unwillingness, he said: "You claim to be my pupil. It is but right that I should claim dakshina from you". "Of course!" said Ekalavya. "I will be honoured if you do but ask". Drona saw the relentless look on the face of Arjuna. He said: "I want your thumb: the thumb of your right hand". Not a sigh escaped the lips of Ekalavya. He smiled and said: "I am happy to give you this dakshina in return for the art I learnt from you. Here it is". He took a crescent shaped arrow from

his quiver and severed his thumb from his right hand and laid the bleeding digit at the feet of his beloved guru.

Drona received it. Arjuna was happy. There was nothing more to be said or done. It was all over. Ekalavya fell at the feet of his guru and saluted him. He bade him adieu. Drona and Arjuna walked silently back to the camp.

CHAPTER 19

RADHEYA

"Mother, will you tell me something?" said Radheya to his mother Radha. She was the wife of the charioteer Atiratha. Radheya was their son. It was his birthday. He was today sixteen years old. He said: "Mother, it is my birthday. Father has bought me a new chariot and new horses. He says that I am now old enough to drive a chariot. But, mother, I do not want to drive a chariot. My hands are eager to hold a bow and arrow. I cannot think of anything else. Waking or sleeping, my thoughts are for ever fixed on this desire. I want to fight. I want to become an archer. Why, mother, why should this unnatural desire find a place in my heart?"

Tears sprang to the eyes of Radha. She sat silent: her tears flowed on. Radheya was shocked to see her tears. He put his arms around her and said: "Mother, have I wounded you? I love you more than my life. If anything I said has hurt you I am sorry. I would rather kill myself than cause you so much pain. Tell me mother, why are you crying?" Without answering his question, she said: "Yesterday you were talking in your sleep. You said: 'Do not go before you answer my question. Who are you? Why do you haunt me like this?' My son, what was your dream?"

Radheya was silent for a few moments. Then he said: "Mother, very often, my sleep is disturbed by a dream. It is always the same dream. I see a woman. She is dressed in costly robes. They are, I think, the raiments of a princess. Her face is hidden by a veil. I am lying down and she bends over me. Hot tears from her eyes burn me. I get up and ask her: 'Who are you?' But mother, this woman of my dreams vanishes like a startled ghost. Mother, tell me, why does this happen to me? Why is it that I do not want to be just a charioteer? There must be some explanation for this".

Radha drew him nearer to her. She placed him on her lap. Holding him close, as if she were afraid to lose him, she said: "My son, the time has come when I should tell you a story. It happened sixteen years ago. It was a very beautiful morning. Early in the morning your father had gone to the banks of the Ganga to offer morning prayers to the sun. His eyes were dazzled by something, some shining object floating on the river. He was intrigued. It looked as though some shining jewel were floating. After a time the object came nearer. Your father's curiosity was aroused. He swam across to the heart of the river to find out what the gleaming object was. He first saw a wooden box. It was wrought beautifully. He went nearer the box and looked inside. He saw a sight which struck him dumb. He found that the box contained a beautiful child. It was the most beautiful child he had ever seen. It was sleeping peacefully. Ganga put him to sleep, perhaps, with a lullaby which his mother would not sing to him. So thought your father. With the box in his hand he swam ashore. He rushed home. 'Radha! Radha! Look! I have brought you something. I have a gift for you', shouted your father. I ran out to see what made him so excited. I could not believe my eyes when I saw the child in his arms. 'Why!' I said, 'the child is as beautiful as the morning sun. It is glowing. Look at the Kavacha and the Kundala! It is a child belonging to some god".

Radheya sat up abruptly. He dared not breathe. So terrible, so full of wonder, was this story. Radha held him closer, as if to say: "In a few moments you will leave me. Till then let me hold you tight". The story went on. "'Surely', I said, 'surely this child is not earthly. It must belong to some god. No earthly child can have this beauty'. Your father smiled at me. He said: 'Perhaps it is a child born of the heavens, which God has sent down to you because you are childless. I feel that he has been created for your sake. I am sure that he is meant for you, just you. I am going to call him Radheya since he will be your dear beloved son'. We were thrilled at the thought of a child in the house. I was very happy. I looked at the box. It was no ordinary box. You had been placed in it wrapped in a piece of silk, costly silk, the kind of silk that only a princess would use. But it was no use speculating. We could guess that you were the son of some high-born maiden, perhaps a princess, who had thought fit to abandon you for reasons known only to herself. We now had a son to brighten our home. That was all that mattered. Since you were born with a Kavacha and Kundala we named you Vasushena. But your father has always called you Radheya. Most probably you belong to a palace. You have been living all these years as the son of a poor charioteer. All the wealth we could give you was the wealth

of our love. It is because of your birth that you do not want to be a charioteer. You want to learn archery because you are a kshatriya. I am almost sure that you are a kshatriya". With sobs racking her frame, Radha said: "Go, my son. You are not my son. Go out into the world and search for your mother. When you find her the void in your life will be filled up. As for me, I am grateful to God for giving me a son all these years. The memory of these few years will keep me alive in the years to come".

Radheya bathed her form with his tears. He said: "Mother, what are you saying? Do you want to abandon me as my other mother did? I do not know who she is. I do not want to know. I have a mother: the sweetest and dearest of all mothers. *You* gave me life. *You* are my mother. I may be a kshatriya. Most probably I am. But I do not care. I do not want to be anything else. I want to be just your son. My name is Radheya, and Radheya I will be to the end of my life. That will be the name by which the world will call me. I am not ashamed of my parents. I am proud to be the son of a suta. I am Radheya the sutaputra. Mother, in this world, there is nothing like learning. Learning cares not for caste or creed. I will go in quest of learning. A learned man will find recognition wherever he goes. The thirst for knowledge, for proficiency in archery, is burning my frame. I will go and acquire knowledge. I will go now. But remember, mother, I am coming back to you. You are my mother and nothing, nothing, can take you away from me, or me from you".

Radheya embraced his mother. She held him close. Their tears flowed and mingled incessantly.

Chapter 20

BHARGAVA'S CURSE

Radheya's one aim was knowledge. He wanted to learn archery. He heard that Hastinapura was famous throughout the world for the archers who had been receiving instruction from the great Drona. Radheya went to the city. He was able to find Drona alone. He saluted him. Then he said: "My lord, I want you to accept me as your pupil. I want to learn archery from you". Drona wanted to know who he was. Radheya said: "I am the son of Atiratha. I am Radheya, the sutaputra". Drona did not relish the idea of teaching

archery to the son of a suta. He said: "You are a sutaputra. I will not teach archery to low-born people". Radheya went back.

He wended his way homewards, haunted by the name Sutaputra, a stigma which clung to his name till the very end of his pain-filled life. He spent days and nights thinking out a way to acquire mastery in archery. He found that his being a sutaputra was a great barrier everywhere. Radheya was desperate. At last he decided to go to Bhagavan Bhargava and learn archery from him. This man was a hater of kshatriyas. Radheya knew about the terrible anger of the rishi. He was in a dilemma. He argued to himself that, since a suta is one who is born to a kshatriya and a brahmin, he would say that he was a brahmin. If he said that he was a brahmin he would certainly be accepted by the great man as his pupil. He made up his mind.

Radheya reached the ashrama of the great Bhargava. With hope burning in his heart like a torch, he entered the ashrama of Bhargava. With his matted locks and burning eyes, Bhargava was a terrible personality. Radheya was overawed by him. He fell at the feet of the great man with reverence and said: "I have come to you with hope and longing. Please do not send me back empty-handed". The sage lifted him up. Radheya's eyes were full of tears. His frame was trembling with fear and a strange exhilaration. Bhargava was pleased with the young man and his humility. Radheya told him that he was a brahmin and that he wanted to learn archery. Bhargava smiled at him gently and said: "I will certainly teach you all that I know. I will do it willingly".

Radheya's education began. He spent many happy months and years in the ashrama of Bhargava. He was able to forget the incessant pain which was gnawing at his heart. He forgot the insults that had been heaped upon him because he was a sutaputra. He forgot the unknown woman of his dreams and the mystery attached to his birth. The dreams were less frequent now. Radheya was bent on only one thing; knowledge. Knowledge meant power; it meant fame; it meant recognition. It was the only thing worthwhile in the world of men.

Fate thought that the time of peace and contentment that Radheya was enjoying should be brought to an end. Fate is indeed a wilful woman. She is gifted with a perverse sense of humour. She can laugh only when her victims weep. She is happy only when she sees someone hurt by her terrible hand. It was so in the case of Radheya. His education was now complete. Bhagavan Bhargava had taught him all the astras; even the Brahmastra and the powerful Bhargavastra. It was nearing the time of the departure of Radheya. Bhargava was giving him his final piece of advice. He said: "I have been very happy all these days. It was a pleasure to teach you archery. I have given

you all the wealth of knowledge that I had. I am proud to have had you as my disciple. You are very honest, fond of those who are elder to you, always eager to walk in the path of righteousness. You must use the knowledge you have acquired, in upholding Dharma. You must never use it in an unrighteous cause".

The sun had now reached the high heavens. The heat was unbearable. The great Bhargava wanted to rest under the shade of a tree. He said: "Go to the ashrama and bring me a roll of deer skin for pillow. I am feeling tired. I would like to rest a while under this tree". "My lord", said Radheya, "I am here. I will sit down and you can use my lap as your pillow. Can I not do this small service to the greatest of men?" Bhargava was pleased with his devotion. So, under the tree they rested, Radheya with his guru's precious head on his lap. His mind was wandering through the maze of words which his guru had spoken now. His guru had called him an honest man. Was he honest? Perhaps not. Radheya had told him that he was a brahmin, when he was not. But then, that was the only way he could get learning for which he yearned with all his soul. The wise said that the end justifies the means. His aim was to acquire knowledge. For that he had spoken an untruth. A lie was a sin if it was used to achieve something sinful. But he had not tried to commit any sin. His lie would certainly be forgiven. Thoughts like these chased each other in his troubled mind.

Some time passed. Suddenly Radheya felt something stinging him in the thigh. The pain was unbearable. Without disturbing his guru he bent down to see what was hurting him. He saw that it was an insect. It was dreadful to look at. It looked like a little pig. It was a very small image of a pig. But it had a sharp snout. The snout seemed to be made of steel, it felt so hard. This snout was embellished with several rows of teeth. It felt as though a steel saw was filing into his flesh. Radheya could not remove it. It was steadily ploughing into his flesh. The pain was intolerable. But what could he do? His guru was sleeping resting his head on his lap and it was not right to disturb his sleep. Racked by the terrible pain, patient Radheya sat unmoved.

The insect, after digging through his flesh had now quite pierced his thigh. Blood streamed forth. The touch of the warm blood on his face roused Bhargava from his sleep. He stared at Radheya and said: "There is blood on my face! Where did it come from?" Radheya said: "From my thigh, my lord. While you were sleeping an insect came and stung me in my thigh. It has been causing me pain for some time now. Blood has started flowing from the wound". The rishi looked at the insect drunk with the blood of Radheya. His

amazement was great. He said: "You say that this insect stung you. You say that it was painful. How is it you did not get up at once and try to stop this pain?" "My lord," said Radheya, "you were sleeping on my lap. You were tired. You were resting. I was more concerned about your sleep than about my pain. I did not want to disturb your sleep. Hence I did not pay any attention to it". Bhargava could not believe his ears. He was puzzled. He said: "I cannot understand it. How can you, a brahmin, bear so much pain? It is well known that brahmins cannot bear pain or even the sight of blood. Tell me the truth! You are not a brahmin. You can never be a brahmin. Only a kshatriya can behave as you have done. Have I, after all these years, taught my astras to a sinful kshatriya? I have hated kshatriyas. I will never forgive you for this your deception. You are a kshatriya. Admit it".

Radheya fell at his feet. Tears streamed from his eyes. It broke his heart to think that all that he had learnt would become futile. He realized that it was to be so. He held on firmly to the feet of his guru and cried: "Forgive me, my lord. You have been more than a father to me. A father should forgive the faults of his child. I am not a brahmin. But then I am not a kshatriya either. I am Radheya, the sutaputra. My father is Atiratha. A suta is born of a kshatriya and a brahmin. Hence I told you that I was a brahmin. The only thing I wanted was learning. Learning, they say, cares not for caste or creed. In your nobleness, you must overlook this fault of mine. I told a lie to you. But it was only to become your pupil. I have been devoted to you. To me, you are dearer than anything else in this world. Please show mercy and forgive me. I beg of you, please forgive me".

Bhargava was furious. He would not relent. Not all the tears and prayers of poor unfortunate Radheya could move him. He was firm. The rishis, they say, have all their senses under control. But it is evident that anger is the one thing they have never been able to control. To think that such a great man as Bhargava, a man who had practised austerities for years and years, should have lost his temper so easily, is strange. He forgot the devotion of Radheya. He forgot his humility. He forgot the affection his pupil had for him. He was blind to the fact that it was this affection for him that made Radheya suffer the insect to sting him. He was himself so fond of Radheya. He forgot even that. Only one thing stood out. Radheya had spoken a lie. All the other facts were thrown right back into the background. Everything was out of focus. Bhargava used the one weapon that rishis are capable of using. He cursed Radheya. He said: "You have learnt archery under false pretences. When you are desperately in need of

an astra, your memory will fail you. You will not be able to remember it". Radheya fell at his feet senseless.

He roused himself a few moments later. With sobs racking his form, he implored: "Why, why have you cursed me like this, my lord? I spoke a lie only because I wanted knowledge. You must not be so harsh". It was of no use. The brahmin's words had been spoken. They were irrevocable. There was no way of recalling his words. Bhargava then addressed Radheya in a slightly mollified tone: "I have spoken. Nothing can change it. But there is one fact about which I can assure you. You wanted fame. You will get it. You will be known in aftertimes as the greatest archer that ever graced the earth". The great Bhargava left him and went away. Radheya slowly raised his head. He saw that his guru had gone away. Wiping his eyes with his forearm he walked away, sunk in the depths of despair.

He walked aimlessly. He did not know where he was going. He reached the shores of the sea. He sat there: he knew not how long. The beating of the waves against the shore made him think of his own ineffectual attempts to fight against the world which had set its face away from him because he was a sutaputra. The mournful dirge of the sea was like a balm to his wounded heart. He got up from there and walked away. When he was coming back he saw an animal flash past. More by instinct than anything else, he shot an arrow at the animal. It fell down dead. He went near and found to his horror that it was not a deer, as he had imagined it to be, but a cow. It belonged to a brahmin. Radheya went to him and told him that he had shot his cow in ignorance. He tried to pacify him by the gift of many more cows and riches. But the brahmin was very angry. He gave vent to his anger by cursing Radheya. He said: "When you are fighting with your enemy, your heart's deadliest enemy, the wheel of your chariot will sink into the ground: and, just as you killed my poor innocent cow when she was unaware of the danger that threatened her, you will also be killed by your opponent when you are least prepared for it".

In a flash, Radheya knew that he was the chosen target of fate. His birth was shrouded in mystery because of the heartlessness of the woman who had given him birth. His boyhood, and later his manhood, was blighted by the stigma "Sutaputra" that clung to his name. Still he thought that he could find happiness in the world if only he became the pupil of Bhargava, the greatest of archers. This had just proved to be a mirage. His guru had cursed him and gone away. And now, on top of that, this curse of the brahmin. Radheya had no more tears to shed. He realized that there was nothing in this world worth living for, worth fighting for. There was only one person who loved him and

that was his mother Radha. He was Radheya. He would remember that and only that. It was up to him to make the world resound with praises of Radheya, the sutaputra. He wanted to make his mother happy. She had loved him when he needed love. She had dried his tears when he went to her with his childish troubles. She had wiped his brow when he was tired. She was his mother. It was the duty of a son to make her name immortal. That was the only purpose in his life now.

Radheya went home to his mother. She heard that his education was now complete. He would not, he could not, tell her now, at once, that it was all to no purpose since the curse had ruined it all. He did not want to break her heart. So he denied himself the comfort of her love and sympathy to tide over the difficult days, days fraught with pain and despair. He was with her for a few days. Then he told her that he would go to the Kuru palace in Hastinapura. He felt that his learning would be a passport into the jealously guarded portals of the great palace.

Chapter 21

THE TOURNAMENT

Drona thought that the time had come when the prowess of his pupils should be exhibited to all the people in the royal household and to the citizens of the city. He approached Bheeshma with the suggestion. Dhritarashtra was also there. They accepted the idea with enthusiasm. "By all means", said Bheeshma. "Let the display be arranged". The king requested Drona to arrange for the erection of the stadium. On an auspicious day Drona had the work begun. It was built in a very short time.

The stadium was an immense creation. It was wonderfully thought out. The stage was at the centre. On either side of it were provided seats. On one side provision was made for the seating of the members of the royal family and other guests from the neighbouring kingdoms. Seats were separately provided for the women of the royal family. On the side opposite to this were built galleries of immense size to accommodate the citizens.

On the day of the tournament the sun shone bright. The place was already filled with the spectators, millions of them, all crowding

to see the feats of the sons of the Kuru House and other houses too, who had been trained by the greatest of archers, Acharya Drona. Everyone was eager. Everyone was excited. Some talked about the duel with the mace which was to be fought between Duryodhana and Bheema. Some talked about the great exhibition of the feats of Arjuna with the bow and arrow. Some spoke disparagingly of the acharya. They said: "Arjuna is the favourite pupil of Drona. In fact it is to show him off that Drona has arranged this big tournament. All the others are to be but foils for Arjuna". Others said: "No, that cannot be. Why, there are so many others who are as good as Arjuna. It is to let Bheeshma know that all the princes are proficient, that Drona has arranged this".

The people from the royal household began to arrive one by one. Bheeshma, with his white beard gleaming in the sun, entered first. Kripa followed him. The king and Gandhari, led by Vidura, entered next. After them came all the other ancients of the Kuru House. Then followed the guest kings. They were all seated. The people were all eagerly waiting for the princes to appear. The noise that arose from that assembly was like the roar of the ocean when the full moon is riding in the sky. There was a crescendo of noise and it ceased as if by magic. The people craned their necks to see the stage. Dressed in pure white, with his gray hair lending dignity and grace to his personality, Drona entered the stage. He was accompanied by his famous son Aswatthama. Vyaasa was there too to watch the proceedings. The king honoured the two preceptors Drona and Kripa. Brahmins were chanting the Vedas. The scene was indeed impressive.

One by one, the princes entered the arena. They were led by Yudhishthira who was the eldest. They walked up to the acharyas and saluted them one by one. They were dressed in the accepted garb of warriors. They stood aside after the salutations were over. Bows were bent and the place resounded with the sound caused by the twanging of the strings of so many bows. The exhibition had begun. The princes performed amazing feats with their bows, arrows, swords, javelins and all the weapons that were commonly used in warfare. The spectators were all watching the show with breathless interest. It was fascinating for them to see the young men and the ease with which they handled the many weapons.

There followed a fight with the mace between Duryodhana and Bheema. They were both proficient in the art of wielding the mace and the duel was watched very keenly by all. Vidura was all the while sitting by the side of the king, giving a running commentary on the proceedings.

The duel was going on. Some were on the side of Bheema and others were siding with Duryodhana. Drona was watching carefully; he knew the hatred the two princes bore towards each other. When he thought that the fight was more intense than was necessary, he spoke to Aswatthama. He said: "It seems to me that this fight is getting too spirited. It is not just a display of their skill. People have begun to take sides. Go and separate the two and bring the duel to a close. Let us not have unpleasantness on the stage today". Aswatthama went quietly to the stage and parted the two combatants who were unwilling to give up. The guru's commands, however, had to be obeyed. With their eyes reddened with anger, with their looks full of wrath, the two young princes parted.

Drona asked Arjuna to appear on the stage. Arjuna looked beautiful as he made his appearance. He was wearing an armour of gold. He held the bow in his right hand. The quivers full of arrows were strapped to his shoulders. His fingers had leather covers to protect them. There was a deafening cheer from all sides when he ascended the stage. The king heard the noise and said: "Vidura, what is that noise? What do the people want?" Vidura smiled and said: "Arjuna, the handsome son of Kunti, has ascended the stage. He is the favourite of all. Looking at him the crowd has become excited. He is being cheered". The heart of the blind king was burning with jealousy. But, hiding it, he spoke words of sweetness, praising the sons of Pandu.

Kunti had already seated herself with the other ladies of the royal house. She was happy to see her sons excel themselves in all the feats. Looking at Arjuna, tears of joy filled her eyes. She felt proud that she was the mother of this beautiful, powerful, young man. Life in Hastinapura had made her forget her past miseries to a certain extent. Now that her sons were grown up, her old worries gradually went out of her mind. She lived for her sons and was happy in their happiness. These few years had lulled her into a sense of security. She felt that her sons were safe, that nothing would make them unhappy, or her for that matter. Nothing would happen to make them unhappy. She was sure of it. Arjuna and his brothers were the favourites of the people.

Arjuna pleased the people with various feats of archery. Everyone was convinced that there was no one to equal him in the use of the bow and arrows. His skill was clearly evident. The arrows poured out of his bow like drops of rain, now one by one and now all together. They could not be seen, so swift was their flight as they coursed through the air. It was a fascinating sight.

When all were absorbed in watching Arjuna and his dexterity, the

people were startled by a sudden noise. It sounded like the clap of thunder. The earth resounded with the roar. The noise came from somewhere near the gateway. Duryodhana and his brothers turned their faces towards the direction from which the sound came. "Has a mountain fallen down? Is the sky suddenly filled with huge black thunder clouds which are bent on destroying the world?" Such were the thoughts that came to the minds of the people. The entire face of the assembly was now turned in the direction of the sound, like a corn field blown in one direction by a steady breeze. Duryodhana stood up with the mace in his hand, surrounded by his hundred brothers and the others, like Indra surrounded by the lesser gods of the heavens. Arjuna had to stop. All the five brothers turned their eyes towards the gateway. The crowd was making way for someone. In a moment, a path could be seen. Someone was approaching. He came nearer. He walked like a lion. The crowd looked on amazed at the sight of a man who looked like a god. They heard the noise again. It was the twang of the bow-string of this newcomer.

It was Radheya. With his Kavacha and Kundala glowing golden in the evening light, he strode to the stage with the grace of a panther. He approached Drona. After saluting him, he addressed Arjuna in a voice compelling as the rumbling of a thunder cloud. "I have come to challenge you. You seem to be too conceited with the skill you have displayed so far. I can do all that and much more too. If your guru permits, I will show you". Radheya repeated all the feats with which Arjuna had so greatly impressed the assembly till then. It would have been a conquest for Arjuna, a complete conquest, if this intruder had not stepped in. A smile of sardonic amusement lit up the face of Bheeshma when he saw the chagrin writ on the face of Drona. Duryodhana's face was touched with love for this stranger. Arjuna was overcome with anger and humiliation. Yudhishthira looked disturbed by the prowess of the newcomer.

Radheya had finished his display. He now challenged Arjuna for single combat, not knowing that he was challenging his brother. Arjuna retorted: "Who are you that dares to come to this stage uninvited, to flaunt your bravery?" Radheya smiled scathingly and said: "This is a tournament: not a private show arranged for your benefit. It is common to all. Everyone is welcome to show his prowess. I am challenging you. Are you able to accept the challenge or will you admit that I am the better archer?" Arjuna, with a disdainful shrug of his manly shoulders, prepared himself for the fight. A strange sight was seen. The sky was suddenly filled with dark blue rain clouds. It looked as though Indra had appeared to protect his son. The sun, however, poured his warm rays on the newcomer. It seemed as though

he wanted to protect his son. The scene was indeed beautiful: Radheya stood bathed in the light of the sun and Arjuna was in the shadow of the black clouds. The spectators were taking sides. The sons of the king were on Radheya's side; Drona, Bheema and Kripa were on the side of Arjuna, the Pandava.

Just before the fight began, there was a sudden confusion among the women. News reached Vidura that Kunti had fallen down in a faint. Just a few moments before this, she had been so happy. The sight of this glowing young man with the Kavacha and Kundala must have given her a shock. She remembered the day she set the child afloat on the river. She had said: "In the distant future I will see you some day. I will recognize you by your Kavacha and your Kundala." He had come, and she knew that he was her son. When she saw her sons vying with each other for supremacy, her heart went through a great agony. Nature, always kind, granted her merciful respite for a few moments by making her faint. Vidura rushed up to her, sprinkled perfumed water on her and revived her. Vidura with his power to see into the past and the future, knew everything. He spoke to her by signs alone. He spoke words full of concealed meaning and with his eyes indicating that he wanted her to keep silent. He was trying to comfort her and help her to bear this new pain. She looked at her two sons, and grief was burning her frame. From that moment she knew no peace or happiness. Her life became one long eternity of pain and anguish.

The two young men were getting ready to fight. With their bows bent, with frowning foreheads and eyes red with anger, they glared at each other. Kripa came up to the stage and said: "Let us observe the rules for fighting a duel. This Arjuna, the Pandava, is the younger son of Kunti. He belongs to the noble House of the Kurus. You, young man, must now announce your father and the family to which you belong. Please announce to the assembly the kingdom which is fortunate to have you as her master. It is the rule that only those who are equal in rank may fight one another. No prince can fight with his inferior".

Radheya's head was bowed down like a lotus drenched in dew.

Duryodhana sprang up from his seat like a king cobra uncoiling itself. He spoke impassioned words: "My lord, ancient Dharma has it that kings are of three kinds: they are kings by birth, they are kings because of their bravery and they become kings when they defeat another king. Bravery, my lord, is not the birthright of kshatriyas alone. You can get fire out of flint and also out of water. Bravery is universal. If, however, this Arjuna is bent on making a fetish of the rule that only a king must fight with a king, he shall have his wish. We will crown

this young man the king of Anga which is now without a master. They can fight after that".

The people stared at the entire proceedings with amazement. This regal gesture of Duryodhana held them spell-bound. There were tears of pride in the eyes of Bheeshma. "Well done! Well done!" was the cry which resounded from one end of the stadium to the other. Every one was watching Duryodhana with bated breath. The prince, with the permission of Bheeshma and Dhritarashtra, sent for sacred water and other things necessary for the coronation. They were brought immediately. Brahmins were chanting the Vedas. Duryodhana placed his own crown on Radheya's head and his own sword in the right hand of Radheya. Radheya was given the coronation bath by the Kuru prince. Duryodhana now said: "You are now the king of Anga, stranger. Arjuna, he is now more than your equal. Fight with him and let us all have the pleasure of watching you".

Radheya's eyes were raining tears. His voice was choked with emotion. He said: "My lord, I do not know how I am to thank you for this great honour you have conferred on me. I do not think I deserve it. How can I repay you? How can I show my gratitude?" The noble Duryodhana smiled and said: "Young man, whoever you may be, your noble qualities deserve not only this small kingdom of Anga but much more. You seem to be fit to rule this entire world. As for us, we do not want anything in return for this small service of ours. I want your love. I want your friendship. Duryodhana wants your heart". Radheya smiled through his tears and said: "My heart! That, my lord, you have already annexed". Duryodhana approached him. With his body drenched with the holy coronation bath, and his eyes wet with the even more holy tears of gratitude and love, Radheya approached the noble Duryodhana. The two friends embraced each other. The moving scene touched the hearts of all. "What a great prince! What a noble gesture! Indeed, it is but fitting that a scion of the noble House of the Kurus should have done what he has done. A prince indeed!" said all the people of the city.

There was some commotion in the crowd. An old man was walking slowly towards the stage with the help of a stick. Radheya rushed up to him. It was Atiratha, his father. Radheya fell at his feet and placed the crown at his feet. The old man said: "Radheya, my child, I am happy to see the good fortune that has befallen you. Praised be the great and noble prince Duryodhana". Everyone knew now that Radheya was a sutaputra. The Pandavas, who were silent till now, allowed themselves to smile scathingly at this 'upstart'. Bheema said: "Listen to me. You, a sutaputra, are not fit to be killed by Arjuna.

You are not fit to hold a bow in your hand. Get thee hence and take up the whip which will suit you better". Radheya was touched to the quick. His lips were throbbing with anger. That was the only indication of his feelings. He stood silent and mutely lifted his eyes to the sun who was his chosen god. The sight sent a shaft of pain through the heart of poor unfortunate Kunti. That he should look to his father for sympathy, without knowing him to be his father, was too much for her. Salty tears drenched her mantle.

Duryodhana sprang up. He looked like a wild elephant bent on destroying a lake full of lotus blooms. Like a cobra spitting poison, he said: "Bheema, you are a prince: you are high born. These words you spoke now are not fit to be spoken by a prince. Bravery, as I said before, is not the heritage of kshatriyas and only kshatriyas. For heroes and rivers the source is of no importance. Think of the birth of all great people. It is usually obscure. The great fire Badava is found in the waters of the ocean. Think of the birth of our preceptors Drona and Kripa. Think of the birth of your father and mine for that matter and that of our uncle Vidura too! Think again of your noble selves. The world knows that you are the sons of your mother and *not* of your father. You are all the sons of a woman who thought fit to take three lovers. Stop this inane talk of yours. As for this young man, it makes me pity you for your lack of understanding. He is full of all the qualities that are found in a kshatriya and only in a kshatriya. Can you not see that a tiger can never be born of a poor meek deer? Can you not *feel* that he *must* be a kshatriya? I have made him the king of the Angas. But I know that he deserves much greater honour. He deserves to be lord of this entire earth. He is born to be great. You are not good enough or great enough to recognize him. I do not care who he is or where he comes from. He is a hero. He will live with heroes. Now ask your beloved Arjuna to fight with him if he dares to". Duryodhana's words were applauded by everyone.

The sun, pleased perhaps with the honour heaped upon his son, wended his way slowly and smilingly towards the west. The tournament, which began so very dramatically, ended in an equally dramatic manner. Drona and Arjuna were the two people who were unhappy at the turn of events. The end of the day found everyone talking only about the newcomer and the great prince Duryodhana. The feats of Arjuna were forgotten by everyone. They were stale. For him, the great tournament had ended in a fiasco.

Torches were lit. The tropical night descended like a pall on the place, enveloping all. In the light of the torches could be seen the two friends: Duryodhana and Radheya. They walked on ahead of the

procession, their arms clasped, their eyes full of love for each other. The others followed them. Bheeshma was still smiling his covert and amused smile; Drona, looking crest-fallen, walked thoughtfully behind the others. Vidura looked so sad and so very serious.

Radheya had appeared as a dangerous comet in the sky of Yudhishthira. Yudhishthira saw clearly that there was no one to equal Radheya in greatness, in skill in archery. Yudhishthira was worried. Till today he had felt secure in the knowledge that, with the strength of Bheema and the power of Arjuna, they were superior to the Kauravas. But now, there was no longer that assurance. Yudhishthira could not be sure that the Pandavas were invincible. This pact between Duryodhana and Radheya was disturbing to his peace of mind. Arjuna's brows were knit in annoyance. Bheema had his fists clenched; he was still smarting under the insulting words spoken by Duryodhana—words for which he had no retort, since they were true, every one of them. The Pandava brothers left the stadium, depressed.

Chapter 22

GURUDAKSHINA : DRONA'S REVENGE

The education of the princes was over. The dream of Drona was to be realized. He collected his pupils round him and said: "The time has come when your Dakshina has to be paid". The princes were greatly excited. They waited to hear what the dakshina was to be. "I do not want any riches", said the acharya. "I want you to go to the kingdom of the Panchalas. I want you to defeat Drupada and bring him to me, a captive. He must not be killed". The princes were terribly excited at the thought of a fight, and they made preparations for it. The hearts of young men will exult at the thought of fighting. This is specially true of kshatriyas. The young men were happy that their test had come. This was to be their first fight. The scions of the House of Kuru collected a huge army and marched towards Panchala. Drona was more excited than all of them.

Hearing that the Kaurava princes were advancing towards his city intent on war, Drupada could not understand the reason for it. He prepared himself to fight. With his brothers to help him, Drupada set out to meet his opponents. The fight was on. The Pandavas kept aloof. They were waiting under a tree in the neighbourhood. They

knew that it would be impossible for the Kauravas to vanquish Drupada. They thought of stepping in after the others had failed. Arjuna went to Drona and said: "These people think that it is easy for them to capture Drupada. But I know it is not. When they fail, I will step in and do what is necessary".

The fight began. The terrible Drupada fought so well that the Kauravas were defeated. Their army was routed. The Pandavas looked on smilingly. They stepped in now. Arjuna asked Yudhishthira to stay behind. "Four of us will capture Drupada", said Arjuna. The chariot of Arjuna was well on its way. Nakula and Sahadeva were the protectors of the wheels of his chariot. Bheema, with his mace in his hand, looked like the Lord of Death. He went through the ranks, felling the warriors on either side. They made straight for the chariot of Drupada. The Panchala king fought furiously. But the tactics of these four men were strange. They did not want to kill anyone. They were bent on accosting only Drupada. Arjuna leaped from his own chariot into that of Drupada. Drupada was overcome, more by surprise than anything else. Before he could decide on his future course of action, Drupada was enveloped in a veritable shower of arrows. He was almost blinded by the sudden darkness around him. Arjuna captured him and placed him in his own chariot. He sped towards the spot where Drona was waiting.

The moment had come: the moment for which Drona had been waiting all these years. It had come after all. The dream had come true. Drona remembered all the past events. He remembered himself standing in front of Drupada with bowed head. Drupada was a proud man drunk with power. Now the tables were turned. Drona was now the superior person. He had Drupada at his mercy. Drona taunted him with cruel words. He repeated all that Drupada had once used. It was Drona's turn to be drunk with power. He said: "You remember you once told me that friendship is possible only between equals? Then, I had nothing that I could call my own. But now, you have nothing that you can call your own. Your kingdom, even your life, cannot be called yours now. But do not be afraid. I will not kill you. I want to be your friend. Since friendship is not possible unless we are equal in status, I will return to you half your kingdom. We will then be equals. Look on this river Ganga. The land lying south of the river will be yours: I will be lord of the land on the north. Come, let us part friends".

Drona, with the short-sightedness typical of a brahmin, thought that it was the end of the matter. He, who could nurse an insult for years and devote his entire life to wreak vengeance on the man who

insulted him, forgot that a kshatriya was capable of a hatred which was just as terrible as that of a brahmin. Drupada did not speak a word. Drona embraced him with great affection. The anger of a brahmin is short-lived. It is alive just as long as it is not pacified. But once the anger is appeased, it dies and forgetfulness blots it out. It was so with Drona. The anger which he had been nursing as he would a child, was gone in a moment. His hatred for Drupada vanished too, like snow on the yellow sands of the desert.

But it was not so with Drupada. The wrath of a kshatriya is more terrible than that of an insulted brahmin. His form burned with anger, with humiliation and hatred for Drona. At that moment he decided on his future course of action. He said to himself: "I must get a son who will be able to kill this hated man. I must get a son who will kill Drona. No ordinary person can kill Drona who is a master of all the astras. I must perform a yajna, a penance, and pray to God to grant me a powerful son: powerful enough to kill this man". The kshatriya in Drupada was full of admiration for the prowess of the young prince Arjuna. "What a wonderful archer! And what a chivalrous fighter!" thought Drupada. "If it is possible, I must get a daughter to give to this young man as a token of my appreciation. I will get two children: a daughter to be given to Arjuna and a son to kill Drona". With these thoughts in mind, Drupada slowly retraced his steps to the city of Kaampilya. His mind was busy with thoughts about the future.

CHAPTER 23

THE PLOT

Dhritarashtra was the king, no doubt. But his kingdom was conquered for him by Pandu. It was the valour and military genius of Pandu which was responsible for the extent of the land of the Kurus. On top of this was the fact that Yudhishthira was older than Duryodhana. He was very popular with the people. Bheeshma, Drona and Vidura were eloquent in their praises of the Pandavas in general and Yudhishthira in particular. Dhritarashtra would, of course, have liked to see his son Duryodhana crowned as Yuvaraja. But he knew how impracticable that was. He had to instal Yudhishthira as the Yuvaraja. The sons of the blind king were furious; but they could do nothing and say nothing.

One year passed. Bheema and Duryodhana became pupils of the great Balarama. Balarama was unequalled in the art of wielding the mace. Strange to say, he became extremely fond of Duryodhana. He taught all his pupils with equal sincerity. But Duryodhana was, to him, what Arjuna was to Drona. He loved Duryodhana, and Duryodhana was devoted to him.

In the meantime, the final touches were given by Drona to the education of Arjuna. He could now proclaim to the world: "No one can equal Arjuna in the entire world". He told Arjuna: "Listen, you are the greatest archer in this world. No one can defeat you; no one, except ONE". Arjuna was surprised and slightly put out. He wanted to know who it could be who was better than even himself. Drona smiled and said: "Learning and humility should go together. Never think too highly of yourself. It is for others to say that you are the greatest archer in the world. It does not look nice if you call yourself that. But coming back to the person I was talking about, it is Krishna of the House of the Vrishnis. He is the greatest of the great. There is no one to equal him in anything. I am not exaggerating when I say this. He is your cousin. His father Vasudeva is your mother's brother. If Krishna becomes your friend, then not all the gods in the heavens nor Indra can do you any harm. Krishna also has heard all about the Pandavas and will only be too happy to be your friend. I hope you will meet him soon".

Yudhishthira was the yuvaraja for a year. Within that year, he became immensely popular with all the people. As for Bheema and Arjuna, their valour became proverbial. Arjuna conquered several kingdoms in the north, south, east and west. The jealousy of the Kauravas was increasing day by day. Dhritarashtra was no exception either. He tried to behave like a father to the sons of his dead brother. But, looking on the valour and strength of the Pandavas, he was suddenly overcome with feelings of unfriendliness towards them. The people spoke highly of Yudhishthira. They said: "The king Dhritarashtra is blind and inefficient. Bheeshma is no doubt very efficient. He is capable and he is very noble. But he renounced his claim to the throne long ago. Duryodhana is not good enough to rule us. It is but right that Yudhishthira should rule us".

These words of the people were duly reported to Duryodhana by his spies, and his heart was full of pain. He went to his father, choosing a time when he would be alone, and poured out all his grievances to him. He told the king about the way the people were talking, and said: "Father, look on the consequences of your rash act. You installed Yudhishthira as the yuvaraja and the people are only dreaming of the

time when he will be crowned king. Why did you do it?" Dhritarashtra said: "You do not understand. Though I am the monarch, this land was conquered for me entirely by my brother Pandu. He was a great warrior. He built up this realm. He then went away to the forest, renouncing everything. He died there, and his orphan sons were brought to me, and I was asked to treat them as my own children. Yudhishthira deserves all the praises heaped upon him. And I also hoped that, with the valiant brothers of his to support him, and the equally valiant sons of mine to aid him, this son of Pandu will be able to re-establish the fame of the Kuru House. There was no thought of denying you your privileges. But now I find you to be full of jealousy towards them and towards Bheema in particular. I tell you, there is no use in trying to harm them. They are well protected by Bheeshma and Vidura. The best thing for you to do will be to give up this hatred for them and behave like a brother towards them. Yudhishthira sits high in the hearts of the people. It will be suicidal to do anything rash."

The prince sighed deeply. His frame was trembling with fury. He wrung his hands together in futile fury and rage. With his eyes red with anger he looked on all sides. He then addressed his father: "Father, I know you are talking like this because of your fear of being overheard. I can assure you there is no one here except you and me. You can be frank and tell me what your real feelings are. If this Yudhishthira becomes king, then, his son will rule after him and his son's son after his son, and so on. The kingdom will become theirs entirely. How can we, the sons of the king, be dependent on the hated Pandavas? We will lose our position as the sons of the king. We will have to do service to the man who is king. I would rather die than be dependent on the Pandavas. I am the son of the king. I must be king too. If you have any affection for me, you must do something about it. Or else, I will kill myself. I have no intention of doing menial service to that glutton Bheema".

Dhritarashtra placed his hand on the bent head of his son whose angry tears burnt his hands. "My child", said the king, "do not grieve. My brother Pandu was a very sweet-natured man. He won the heart of everyone by his gentleness and his charm. His son Yudhishthira is just like him. He has annexed the heart of each and everyone in the land. If anything should happen to him, we will be blamed. The Pandavas are extremely popular. Bheeshma, Drona, Kripa and Vidura are all well disposed to them. We cannot afford to antagonise them. It was only after considering all this, that I arrived at the decision to crown Yudhishthira as Yuvaraja".

"Father," said Duryodhana, "let me tell you something. Let us not consider grandfather. He has maintained an indifferent attitude towards all of us. Ever since these cousins of mine came, I have noticed one thing. Grandfather has never taken up the cause of either side. Bheema used to harass us. Grandfather ignored the hurts caused to us. Later we tried to harm Bheema. I have tried to kill Bheema. The same attitude was maintained by Grandfather. I have a feeling that he does not care very much about anything that happens here. I have often seen him in the palace gardens walking along the banks of the river Ganga, sunk deep in reverie. I once caught him shedding tears even. I asked him why he was crying. He took me on his lap—he is very fond of me, you know—and said: 'Nothing, my child, nothing. Only I am tired; too, too tired'. 'Then, why do you not take a long rest?' I said. Grandfather's eyes became wet. 'No, my child', he said, 'I cannot rest. I must not'. He then asked me to run away and said: 'Do not worry about me and my rest. It will not be for a long time to come. I will be alright after that'. This happened years ago. It is funny, my remembering it so vividly. It seems clear to me that our dear grandfather has no thought of us at all. He has some secret sorrow of his own. He will not care what we do. Aswatthama is my dear friend. His affection for me is constant as the northern star. He is on my side. Drona will have to be on my side. No father will take the side opposite to his son. Kripa will now naturally side with these two. That leaves only Vidura. He is very fond of the Pandavas. He is prepared to abandon even you, if it comes to a choice between you and the Pandavas. But what can one low-born man do? He can only talk to you about Dharma. Let him. You enjoy his talks anyway. Father, I have thought out a plan. You say that Yudhishthira is loved by the people. I agree. If, however, you send the Pandavas away with their mother to some distant place, say, Varanavata, for a year, I will try and win the love of the people. After all, in a year's time, people will forget Yudhishthira. The common people are known for their short memories. They will learn to love me. As for the Pandavas, IF and when they return, they will find their days of glory gone. You must do this for me. Send them away from here. If you love me, remove this sharp arrow from my heart. It is killing me, robbing me of my peace of mind. I have not been able to sleep since a long time now. Send the Pandavas with their mother to Varanavata, and I will take care of the rest. I will see that something definite is done". With these parting words Duryodhana went away.

The king sat alone for a long time, alone with his sinful thoughts. He knew his son. He knew that a plot would be hatched so that the Pandavas would never come back. He did not say anything or

do anything to his son. But by his silence he had lent his approval. Dhritarashtra was hoping to finalise the plot with the help of his evil mentors. His jealousy for the unfortunate sons of his dead brother was just as great and violent as that of Duryodhana. Only, he knew how to hide it: his son did not.

Dhritarashtra sent for a man called Kanika. This man was a friend of Sakuni. He was a pastmaster in all the different crooked ways of a schemer. The old king asked him how to set about the task. He said: "My son and I are burning with hatred and jealousy. The cause must be known to you. The rise of the Pandavas is unbearable to us. Can you suggest some method by which we can rest in peace?" Kanika said: "The only way to get peace is to abandon the Pandavas. Get rid of them somehow. But remember, you must be able to practise hypocrisy. You must pretend to be fond of them but in reality find ways and means of destroying them. The only cure is killing. It is not safe to allow the enemy to thrive. It will then be like trying to cut a tree which has grown too strong. You must nip it off when it is young. It is better for you to protect yourself and your sons. The Pandavas are getting stronger day by day. I am telling you clearly what should be done". After giving this golden advice Kanika went away.

Chapter 24

THE PANDAVAS SENT TO VARANAVATA

A few days passed. The king sent for Yudhishthira and said: "I have been told that the city called Varanavata is very beautiful. Why don't you all go there and spend some time happily in that beautiful city? After a year or so you can come back to Hastinapura. What do you say?" He thought that the guileless prince would not see the reason behind this sudden suggestion. Yudhishthira, however, saw through the whole thing. He knew that the intentions of the king were not kind. But he realized his own helplessness. He said: "I will do what you wish". He told all the elders, Bheeshma, Drona, Vidura and the others: "I have been asked by my uncle, or rather I have been commanded by my uncle, to spend a few months at Varanavata. Please bless us and wish us well". He added: "When we were children, very young children, our father died. We were brought to you and you are to us father, mother and well-wisher. I ask of you to treat us with the affection due to us. We are children who trust you implicitly"

Yudhishthira addressed his grandfather: "You, our grandfather, can see how much affection our uncle has towards us. He wants us to spend some time in Varanavata, the shrine of the great Sankara who destroyed the sinful Tripura. Indeed, we are fortunate in our father who thinks only of our welfare". This speech steeped in sarcasm must have touched the heart of Bheeshma who was himself very much at home in sarcasm. But, as Duryodhana said, he was indifferent. He could easily have interfered. He could have stopped this exile of the Pandavas. But he did not, since he did not guess the sinfulness of Dhritarashtra. He could not have dreamed that he would go to such an extreme. The arrogance of Duryodhana had not yet reached the stage when he openly defied his elders, nor was Dhritarashtra fully revealed to his uncle. Bheeshma could not guess the evil intentions of the Kauravas. Poor Yudhishthira saw that Bheeshma could not be made to guess what he was trying to tell him. He realized that he was helpless. He made preparations to leave for Varanavata. He knew that something had been planned by his uncle. But he could not guess the exact form in which danger awaited them at Varanavata.

As soon as they heard that the Pandavas had agreed to go to Varanavata according to the wishes of Dhritarashtra, Duryodhana and his uncle Sakuni decided to finalise the plot. Duryodhana sent for Purochana, one of the ministers in his father's court. He spoke to him alone, making sure that they were not overheard. He took the right hand of Purochana in his and said: "All this world with her riches is mine. You are as dear to me and near to me as my father. You can share this kingdom with me now. You are no stranger to me or my thoughts. It is up to you to help me in my hour of need. You know that the Pandavas have been asked to go to Varanavata by my father. I want you to leave today, immediately, for Varanavata in a chariot drawn by the fastest of steeds. You must travel faster than the mind. In Varanavata you must build a palace for the Pandavas. You must equip it with the richest articles: you must make it a fit place for the dwelling of princes. But remember, the house must be built of highly inflammable materials like lac and wax. You must store pots of oil and ghee in several of the apartments. The house must be ready by the time they reach the city. You must perfume it in such a way that the people may not suspect the real building materials used. Then, you must approach the Pandavas with great humility and ask them to live in that house. You must tell them that my father had this house built specially for their comfortable stay in Varanavata. You must win their confidence. When they have lived in that house for some time, when you are sure that they are unsuspecting, you must

set fire to the house. The fire should look as though it had been started accidentally. People must not suspect. I want this to happen successfully. I do not want this plot to fail. This is my only chance of getting rid of those hated cousins of mine without anyone suspecting that I had a hand in their destruction. I depend on you, entirely". Purochana assured him that his wishes would be carried out to the letter. He hurried to the city of Varanavata and began the construction of the dreadful house of lac. It was built on a very elaborate scale.

Dhritarashtra had asked the Pandavas to go to Varanavata for a year. The news spread like wild fire. The people were all unhappy. There were some who were bold enough to express their opinion. They approached Yudhishthira and said: "This blind king is not good in his intentions. Why should you listen to him if he tries to do you harm? Please do not go to Varanavata. It will cause you unhappiness: or something more terrible than just this unhappiness. Dhritarashtra does not like you or your brothers. It is very unfortunate that Bheeshma is blind enough to allow this injustice without paying attention to it. We beseech you, do not go to Varanavata". Yudhishthira pacified them with the words: "It has always been my rule, which I have set up for myself, never to refuse to do anything that my elders ask me to do. Fatherless as we are, Dhritarashtra is our father. It is my duty to obey him. You must all bless us and send us to Varanavata". With tears in their eyes the citizens walked part of the way with the Pandavas and bade them farewell.

Almost all the citizens had gone away. Vidura walked some distance with the Pandavas. He wanted to speak words of warning to Yudhishthira. He said: "Yudhishthira, you are righteous. You are also intelligent. You must learn how to protect yourself from danger. There are weapons more deadly and dangerous than swords and arrows. Even during the terrible days of winter the rat knows how to protect himself by digging a hole for himself. An intelligent man knows how to protect himself even if no way is apparent. Against fire, a weapon more dreadful than the sword, a man should protect himself as the rat does. The way is clear after that. The stars are always there to show you the way. If you have your senses alert nothing can hurt you". Vidura spoke these words in Mlecha Bhasha, a dialect known to very few people. The unfortunate prince Yudhishthira bent his head down, acknowledging the words, and passed on towards Varanavata. Vidura felt as though a load had been lifted off his mind. He bade them adieu and went home.

On the way Kunti asked Yudhishthira: "What was Vidura telling you? He did not want the people to know about it. That is why he used that strange dialect. If it is not a secret tell me what he told

you". Yudhishthira said: "He warned me against fire and poison: I think he meant fire. He also told me that my path would be clear with the help of the stars. I told him that I understood. From what he hinted I gather there is danger awaiting us at Varanavata. My noble cousins and their equally noble father dare not fight us in the open. Evidently they are going to use treachery. Let us wait and see. There is always uncle to protect us". They travelled for eight days. On the eighth day they reached Varanavata, the city which does not belong to anyone but the lord Sankara.

Chapter 25

IN VARANAVATA

The Pandavas reached Varanavata the city which had gained immortality because Harischandra of the Solar race lived there during his days of trouble. The people of the city welcomed them with great joy and enthusiasm. The city was decorated. The chief citizens played hosts to the princes. On the tenth day Purochana went to Yudhishthira and asked him with great humility to come and dwell in the newly-built palace. The house, he said, had been built for them, Dhritarashtra had asked him to build it for their special comfort during their stay in Varanavata. The house built of lac was called "SIVA" by the evil-minded Purochana. The Pandavas went to live in the house, to the great delight of Purochana. The palace had a moat dug round it. Purochana explained it off by saying that it was for their safety against intruders. Actually it was to prevent the Pandavas from escaping from the house when it caught fire.

When they were alone, Yudhishthira called Bheema to his side and said: "Bheema, do you notice the strange smell pervading the entire house? The house is made of inflammable material. It has been built for us by our beloved relatives who love us so much. The Kauravas have decided that this house is to be burnt. They have decided to have us burnt in this house called Siva. This is what uncle Vidura meant when he said that I must have my senses alert. He asked me to beware of weapons deadlier than the sword. I did guess that he meant fire. He must have overheard the plot when it was being hatched". Bheema was very angry. He said: "If this house is meant to be burnt, then let us get out of here. Let us go back to the house where we were staying till now. If we stay here the danger is immense. We will be

caught like rats in a trap. Did you notice the moat outside? That is meant to cut off our retreat. Let us go away from here as early as we can. I am sure Purochana will set fire to the house immediately and we will be caught in the burning house. Brother, let us go away soon". Yudhishthira smiled at him and said: "Let us not do anything rashly. I have a feeling that the burning will not be in the immediate future. The plot is too deep. If they burn us immediately it will be obvious to everyone that the Kauravas were responsible for this. They are playing a waiting game. Two can play at the same game. I have great trust in our uncle Vidura. He would have thought out some way of saving us. Let us wait. Let us continue in this house for some time more. We will wait, and see what happens".

Bheema said: "Brother, you forget that they are such hardened sinners. They are not particular about public opinion. Think of those days when they tried to kill me. They fed me with the poison called Kalakuta. They threw me into the river to be bitten by snakes. Did I die? NO! The lord who protected me then, will protect us now. Let us go away from here and announce to the world the evil intentions of the blind king and his sons. What can they do to us? We are powerful enough. God is on our side. He who saved us all these years will save us hereafter too. I do not like this life of inaction. Arjuna alone will be able to destroy all of them. As for me, just allow me and I will kill all of them with my bare hands. I do not need any weapons. Curse them, they have killed all the peace of mind we had in those days".

Yudhishthira pacified his younger brother and said: "My dearest Bheema, you do not understand. There are several things to consider. Let us suppose that we are burnt in this house of lac. Can you guess what will happen? Our dear uncle will weep crocodile tears. He will say: 'Haa! The Pandava boys! Oh! my children! You were the hope of my old age. You are gone. Indeed Fate is cruel!' After a few words like this, he will keep quiet because he will be immensely pleased with everything. His next worry will be thinking out methods of hiding his glee. Our grandfather is a very righteous man, no doubt. But in his mental make-up there lurks somewhere the icy coldness of his grandfather Himavan. He will be sorry, really and genuinely sorry since he has not been able, so far, to realize the magnitude of the king's hatred for us. But he will not be sorry enough to punish Duryodhana and avenge the death of the Pandavas with their mother. Drona and Kripa will be sorry too. But that is all. No one will be bold enough to accuse the king and Duryodhana. They are supreme. If, as you say, we come out into the open, do you know what will happen? Suppose we accuse the Kauravas publicly. We will not be heard. It will

be like a poor man fighting with a rich man, like a weakling fighting with a wrestler, like a young unfledged bird fighting with a full-grown eagle. We have no supporters. I feel that the best thing to do is to wait. We will surely escape from here, thanks to our uncle Vidura. We will go about disguised. Duryodhana will be lulled into false security, thinking that we are dead. When the time comes, we will rouse him from his dream of peace. By then we will collect friends and support which will make the Kauravas realize that it is impossible to attempt anything on the Pandavas. I think this is the best course of action".

Bheema was convinced by the sensible and very practical view of Yudhishthira. The Pandavas continued to live in that house, outwardly unsuspecting and inwardly dreading the ordeal that awaited them. It was the most terrible time of their lives.

Chapter 26

THE BURNING OF THE HOUSE OF LAC

There was a miner who was a good friend of Vidura. He was sent to the city of Varanavata. He came to Yudhishthira and said: "I am a miner sent by Vidura to help you". He repeated the sentences which Vidura had spoken in Mlecha Bhasha to Yudhishthira. This was a passport into the confidence of Yudhishthira who had to be careful about everything, specially strangers who professed themselves to be friends. Yudhishthira said: "What does my uncle command me to do?" The miner said: "Your uncle has told me everything about this house. I have been sent to build an underground tunnel connecting this palace with the bank of the river Ganga". Yudhishthira's face registered relief. He said: "Good. I think it is an excellent idea. It must be begun at once". The miner began to build the tunnel. But it was not an easy task. Purochana was in the house always. It looked as though he were waiting attendance on them, but in reality he was keeping an eye on them to prevent them from escaping. The Pandavas knew all this. They had to get him out of the house. Therefore, they spent most of the time outside the house, wandering in the surrounding forests. They wanted to become familiar with the lie of the land so that they could find their way easily when they would have to escape during some fateful night. They pretended to be in-

terested in hunting. Purochana would be with them. Thus they succeeded in weaning him away from the house.

At last, the task was over. The tunnel had been completed. It was a very big tunnel. The mouth, however, was small. The door to the tunnel was right in the courtyard of the house. It was covered by a costly rug.

It was now almost a year since the Pandavas had come to Varanavata. Purochana thought that the time was ripe. He felt that he had gained the confidence of the Pandavas. The miner told Yudhishthira that Purochana had planned to set fire to the house on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight, when the world would be enveloped in darkness. Yudhishthira told Bheema: "Bheema, Purochana has decided to burn us in a few days. The time has come when we must arrange our flight. Let us arrange to leave six people to sleep here. Purochana, of course, stays here always. We will then set fire to this house called Siva, and escape through the tunnel".

The next day Kunti had a feast arranged to feed all the poor in the city. There was a nishada woman who would come often to the presence of Purochana. Kunti was aware of the fact. This woman also came to the feast. Kunti was very pleasant to her. She thought that she was now a friend of the queen. She had five sons. On the day of the feast this nishada woman was made to drink her fill; so were her sons. She and her sons were so drunk that they slept in the palace that night. Purochana was drunk too. So, that night there were seven people sleeping in that house. Late in the night the Pandavas set about their escape. Their preparations were quick and silent. Kunti and four of the Pandavas entered the tunnel first. Bheema, with a flaming torch in his hand, danced about all over the place, setting fire to the walls of the apartments, to every corner of the place. He knew where the pots of oil and ghee were placed. He knew where Purochana was sleeping in a drunken stupor. He set fire to that place. Bheema then hastened to the trap door. The house had already begun to burn. He rushed into the tunnel. He left the door open. He knew that the debris would cover up the door and part of the tunnel too and prevent people from discovering that the Pandavas had been able to escape through the tunnel.

The entire city woke up from a deep sleep by the noise of the house burning. There were terrible crashing noises when the house fell down. No one could come near and try to rescue the princes since the moat could not be crossed. They all stood helpless and watched the house as it was being burnt by the leaping flames. No one could do anything. They had to stand by and watch the beloved Pandavas

being burnt. It did not require much intelligence for them to guess that Dhritarashtra and his son were responsible for this tragedy. The people of Varanavata cursed the Kauravas and wept for the young princes and their mother who had been murdered in such a treacherous manner. They stood all night watching the palace of lac being burnt to ashes.

The Pandavas, in the meantime, were hurrying through the tunnel. Bheema heard the crash of the building falling down. He hurried them along. There was the danger of the tunnel closing up before they came out of it. Kunti and her other children were so sleepy and so nervy that they could not walk fast enough. Bheema took them all up. With his dear mother on his back, the twins on his hips and the other two in his arms, this great hero walked the entire length of the tunnel. They reached the bank of the river Ganga at long last. From that distance they could see the sky red with the flames rising from the burning house. The river flowed placidly. It was comforting to see her flow so serenely. She was unruffled. It seemed as though she was setting them an example, as if to say: "Do not let these things trouble you. They will pass". They were now to the south of Varanavata. There they met a man who had been stationed there by the thoughtful Vidura. He said: "Thank God you have come. I saw the house burning and was worried about you. I have been here every night for the last so many nights. We did not know when you would be able to escape from the house of lac. Vidura has placed here a boat to ferry you across the river. It is in readiness. After you reach the other side of the river Vidura wants you to proceed southwards. The path will be clear to you because of the stars. You are asked to keep your whereabouts and even your existence a secret for the next few months". It is to be noted that all the people sent by Vidura spoke first the words in Mlecha Bhasha which Vidura had first used. That was the only way to convince Yudhishthira that they were real friends. The Pandavas were surrounded by spies and enemies on all sides: they could never have made out the difference between a friend and a foe.

The boatman came near. He first convinced them that he was a friend. Then he said: "Vidura has paid me enormous money and he has asked me to wait here every night with my boat. 'Some day', said Vidura, 'some day, the Pandavas will be there with their mother and you will have to ferry them across the Ganga and leave them on safe ground'. The day has come. I have the good fortune of guiding the Pandavas. I am indeed fortunate since God has made me fit to do such a good turn to the best of men". They crossed the river and entered the terrible forest. The night was dark and dreadful. But

the princes had to hurry as much as they could. Distance was a dire necessity now. They had to go as far away from Varanavata as they possibly could. They hurried along with quick steps.

CHAPTER 27

NEWS REACHES HASTINAPURA

In Varanavata the dreadful night was over. The house had been burnt down completely. The fire had abated and the people could now cross the moat and see what had happened. It was terrible to see the charred remains of seven bodies. They knew for certain that the Pandavas with their mother had been burnt to death. The seventh was Purochana. The people were happy to see that at least Purochana was punished for his sinfulness. They were unhappy at the fate which had overtaken the Pandavas. Their wrath was great. They said: "It is obvious that this has been done at the instigation of the old king and his son". The miner, who had built the tunnel for the Pandavas, went in without being noticed, and looked for the opening of the tunnel. He found that it was completely hidden by the debris. He admired the wisdom of the Pandavas and returned to Hastinapura to report to Vidura about the escape of the Pandavas. The other agents of Vidura also went to him and told him about the safety of the Pandavas. Vidura knew now that they had crossed the river Ganga and were proceeding southwards as he had advised them to do.

News travels fast. The people of Hastinapura were sunk in despair when they heard about the death—nay, murder—of the Pandavas. Hearing the news the wily king Dhritarashtra pretended to be grief-stricken. His heart was full of a great happiness, but he had to pretend. He looked as though he were overcome by the calamity that had befallen him. Like the cloud that roars in autumn making much noise without giving any rain, he gave vent to his grief. He sent messengers to Varanavata to perform the funeral rites for the dead people. He ordered the treasurer to distribute wealth and clothing to the poor in accordance with the custom. All of them went to the banks of the river Ganga to offer funeral oblations. Vidura was there with them. He knew his brother, and his exultation at the event. He knew him to be the home of insincerity and scheming. Vidura too mourned along with the others.

Vidura's heart was touched at the grief of Bheeshma. The old man was beside himself with grief. Vidura could not bear to see it. He went near Bheeshma. As if by accident, he took him aside after making sure that there was no chance of their being overheard. Vidura said: "Please do not give way to grief. This funeral oblation is unnecessary since the Pandavas are not dead". Bheeshma was struck dumb with surprise. Vidura told him the entire story. He added: "This plot was hatched by the king, his son and Sakuni. They are all now happy because they think that their sin is not known to anyone. But *I know*. I know that no harm can come to the Pandavas. They are now going to Siddhavata, a forest on the southern side of Ganga. When the proper time comes, they will emerge out of obscurity, like the moon after the dark fortnight. I will one day see them lords of this world. But we must wait. The time is not ripe enough". Bheeshma applauded Vidura for his wisdom and his farsightedness. They went to the palace. No one knew about this conversation. The old king and his sons were now happy. They felt that their days of worry were at an end.

Chapter 28

BHEEMA'S MARRIAGE WITH HIDIMBI

The Pandavas, having crossed the river Ganga, wended their way towards the south. They reached Siddhavata. They were extremely tired and thirsty. Bheema's brothers addressed him: "Bheema, the way is long and we are weary. But we have to walk a long distance. You must help us once again. You must carry us as you did before". Bheema willingly carried them all, and walked fast towards the south. The son of Vayu travelled faster than his father. He was intent on only one thing: by daybreak they should be far away from Varanavata. Duryodhana's spies were everywhere.

The dreadful night was over. Bheema realized that they had gone quite a long distance away from the city of Varanavata. They had travelled eighty yojanas. Kunti was extremely tired. She said: "I am dying with thirst. I cannot proceed even a step further without water. I am extremely sleepy. I will rest under some tree. I have to. If we are captured by the Kauravas I do not care. I am past all caring". There were tears in her eyes when she said this. Bheema

took them to a grove nearby and said: "You must all rest here. I feel that there is water somewhere near. I can hear the noises made by the water birds". Yudhishthira asked Bheema to go and get some water for their mother. Bheema went in search of water.

Not far away from there he saw a beautiful lake, its surface covered by lotuses and lotus leaves. It was so beautiful that he could not believe it. Bheema also could not walk fast. He was so full of fatigue. He drank deep of that wonderful water. He bathed in it. It was so inviting. He forgot all his fatigue and sleepiness in the thrill of bathing in that cold water. He came out. He wetted his upper cloth with water. He made a cup out of the huge lotus leaves and carried water in that. When he reached the spot where he had left his mother and brothers he found them fast asleep. He woke them up one by one and gave them water. They drank it and again went to sleep.

Bheema sat there by their side, watching them. He thought that his heart would break into a million flinders. The sight of his mother sleeping on the ground which was covered by leaves, was enough to melt a heart of stone. He looked at them one by one: his mother and his beloved brothers. They looked so pathetic and helpless while they slept. He said to himself: "Here lies my mother. She is the sister of Vasudeva of the House of Vrishnis. She is the daughter-in-law of the great House of Kuru. She is the wife of the famous Pandu and she is the mother of five brave sons. Brave indeed! Here we are, running away to save ourselves from the cruelty of a man who is our father in name! Here lies my brother, a god-like man fit to rule the world. Here is Arjuna, the greatest archer in the world. These twins, dark and handsome, looking like blue lotuses, can destroy the entire family of Dhritarashtra. Yet such is fate that we have to go about in hiding, afraid of that heartless man. Can anything be more tragic than this? They, the evil-doers thrive in the world while we have to suffer at their hands. Still, let us wait and see. The end is of importance and not the beginning. The river begins her course from some unknown crevice in the snow-clad mountain. But her end is so glorious. We will also be great somewhen. It is not in the near future. My brother says: 'Wait'. I shall wait. The world will then see how I shall take revenge on the sinners who were responsible for this scene". They were all sleeping. Bheema thought that it would not be wise if he slept too. Also, the bath had refreshed him and the cold sting of the water had banished sleep from his eyes. He decided to sit and watch over them all.

The forest where they were resting was called Hidimbavana. It belonged to a rakshasa by name Hidimba. He and his sister Hidimbi

lived in that forest, eating all the human beings who were foolish enough to enter that forest. While the Pandavas were sleeping, Hidimba was sitting on top of a tree. Suddenly he smelt human flesh. He looked around and saw the sleeping forms of the Pandavas. He spoke to his sister: "Listen to me, my dear sister. There are human beings here. I can see them from here. My mouth is already watering at the thought of the delicious flesh. I will wait here. You must hurry hence and kill those human beings. We can then have a feast. It is such a long time since I tasted human flesh". She agreed to do so.

Jumping from tree to tree, Hidimbi arrived at the spot very soon. She saw the sleeping Pandavas and their mother. She saw Bheema keeping guard over them. She saw they were all beautiful. They were more lovely than anything she had seen so far. Her eyes came to rest on Bheema. Looking at his body which was beautifully proportioned, she was overcome with love for him. He was the perfect specimen of manhood with his broad chest, slim waist and narrow hips. The name Vrikodara was a suitable name for him. Bheema's figure was just as slim and graceful as that of a wolf. Hidimbi told herself: "I have a feeling inside me which tells me that this dark handsome man is meant to be my lord and master. I love him. How can I obey my brother when my heart is given to this man? He is the only man fit to be my husband". She stood at a distance for a while looking at him all the while as if her eyes could not drink their fill. She now assumed the form of a lovely woman. She approached him slowly, very slowly. Bheema turned and looked at her. Her dark form draped in chaste white, she was beautiful enough to charm anyone. He was surprised to see her there and said: "Who are you? You are so very beautiful. How is it you are alone in this dreadful forest?" She looked at him with sidelong glances. She smiled a little and spoke to him in a sweet soft caressing voice. She said: "Who are you? You are so handsome. Who is this dark beautiful woman who is sleeping here? Who are these young men? Did you not know that this forest belongs to a cruel rakshasa called Hidimba? He relishes human flesh. I must confess that I am his sister, Hidimbi. He saw you from a distance and sent me here to kill you all and bring him his favourite food. I came here with that intention. But looking at you and your handsome form, all sinful thoughts have fled from my mind. I have fallen in love with you. I want you as my lord and lover. If you refuse me I will not be able to live. Please accept me. I will make you very happy".

Bheema said: "This is my brother, my elder brother whom I honour as my god. This is my mother. These are my younger brothers. They are all depending on my strength to protect them. What you ask is

impossible. I cannot marry you leaving them". She said: "I will carry you and your mother away from here. I can assume any shape and any form. I will go far away from my brother and live with you on a mountain top. Come with me". Bheema said: "I am not so fond of this life of mine that I should protect it leaving my helpless brothers behind. As for your proposal I think it is wrong. You cannot ask me to do something that is against all Dharma". With tears in her eyes Hidimbi said: "I have offended you. I am sorry. I do not want to displease you. I will carry you all away from here. This place is dangerous because of my brother. We must hurry. Please wake up your mother and your brothers. My brother will be here any moment". Bheema said: "Never! They are sleeping so peacefully. I will not give them a rude awakening. As for your brother, let him come. I am not a coward. I am stronger than you think. I have immense strength. I can take care of your brother".

They heard a loud noise nearby. Hidimba waited for his sister for a long time. She did not come. He became curious about the delay. So he came to find out for himself the reason. He drew near. It was his approach that they heard. Hidimbi was upset. She said: "Even now it is not too late. My brother is very near. Still I can carry you all away from here. Please listen to me". Bheema smiled at her and said: "Do not be upset. Your brother will today meet his match. I can defeat him easily. I am glad I will be able to rid this forest of this pest. Look at me. Look at my arms. They are strong enough to crush the life out of the form of your brother. Do not insult me by thinking that I am not strong enough to tackle him". Tears came to her eyes. She said: "My lord, there was no thought of insulting you when I spoke of danger to you. I have now fallen in love with you. You have become so dear to me that I am not willing to lose you. I am afraid that I may lose you. I will wait and watch you kill my brother. You will then take me for wife". Bheema did not speak a word in reply. He smiled to himself.

Hidimba had now come near enough to hear his sister. His eyes were red with anger. He shouted: "So this is how you bring food for your brother. I will punish you. First I will kill this man who is impertinent enough to think that he is more than a match for me. Then I will take good care of you. You can meet him in the hall of death". He came near Bheema. Smiling at the rakshasa, Bheema said: "Please do not make so much noise. My brothers and my dear mother are sleeping. They are very tired. Do not dare to wake them up. As for your talk to your sister, I will kill you for your words. She came here fully intent on obeying you. But she fell in love with me. A

woman in love cannot harm her beloved. You say that you will kill her. Let me see how you can do it when I am here. I will rid this forest of you, a monster which has been frightening all the forest dwellers".

The two began to fight like two angry tuskers charging at each other. Hidimbi was just watching, her eyes wide with astonishment at the sight of powerful Bheema. The noise of the fighting roused the sleeping princes and their mother. A strange sight met their eyes. Bheema was fighting with a rakshasa, by the looks of him. By their side, however, sat a beautiful woman looking at Bheema with eyes full of love. Kunti spoke to her softly: "Young woman, you are very beautiful. Are you the goddess who protects this wild forest? Are you an apsara? Who are you and what are you doing here? Why are you watching this dreadful fight? Tell me everything". With her head downcast, with nervous gestures Hidimbi said: "This dense forest, looking like a dark rain cloud laden with water, is the place where we live, my brother and I. The rakshasa who is now fighting with your son is my brother". She told them all that had been happening. She told Kunti about her love for Bheema. Yudhishthira and his brothers stood watching the fight. After a while Arjuna said: "Bheema, give me a chance. This is not right. You have been awake since two nights. You have walked such a distance carrying all of us. You must be tired. I am now feeling fresh after the sleep I had. Leave him to me and you take rest". Bheema laughed and said: "Arjuna, do not worry. He is almost dead. Caught between my two mighty arms, who can escape death? Why should two of us spend our energy to crush this little insect? You just sit and watch the fun. It will be over soon". Arjuna said: "You must hurry. Evening is drawing near. You know that the strength of rakshasas will increase when night falls. You must kill him before the sun's rim touches the western hill". Bheema took up the immense form of the rakshasa in his hands and crushed the life out of him. With a terrible cry of pain, Hidimba fell down dead. Bheema's anger did not subside even then. He pummelled the body until it became a shapeless mass of flesh.

Yudhishthira embraced his brother and said: "I am fortunate. When I have you for brother, when I have this Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva to protect me, why should I think that I am alone? I am stronger than all the devas put together." Bheema was made to rest for a while. Then Yudhishthira said: "Let us move away from here". Arjuna said: "It looks as though there is a city somewhere about. Let us go there". They began their journey.

Poor Hidimbi followed them. She approached Kunti and said: "What shall I do?" Hearing her voice, Yudhishthira turned round. Hidimbi continued: "You are the elder brother of this young man and

you are his mother. I fell in love with him. I want you both to influence him and make him take me for wife. I cannot live if he refuses me". She looked at Kunti and said: "Mother, you are a woman. You must know how much I am suffering. You must grant me my life. You must grant me happiness. He is my chosen lord. I will protect all of you from all the dangers in the forest. I will carry all of you when you are too tired to walk. Only, please give me this young man". Kunti was touched by the sincere love this woman had for her son. She said: "Yudhishthira, this woman loves Bheema. I feel that her desire should be granted. As for Bheema, it looks as though he is not quite averse to this". She looked at Bheema who looked everywhere except in her direction. The brothers smiled at his discomfiture. This was a new Bheema. They had never seen him like that before. He smiled bashfully and kicked the stones that lay at his feet. Yudhishthira smiled mischievously at him and said: "Bheema, I know what is worrying you. You think that since I am your elder brother you must not take a wife until I do. Do not let that worry you. When eye meets eye, then is a marriage performed. You can take her for wife. I want you to be happy". The two beings who were in love looked at each other and looked away.

Chapter 29

BIRTH OF GHATOTKACHA

Hidimbi took them all to the sacred lake called Salivahana. She built a beautiful cottage for them. She brought good food. Then she told Kunti: "Mother, I know how much you love your son. I will take him with me now. But every night I will bring him back to you". Bheema told her: "I am happy to see how much you care for me. I will remain with you for some time. But knowing the story of our lives you must realize that there are many things we have to do to punish our evil-minded cousins. I will remain with you until a son is born to us. We will then have to leave you and go, not because I want to, but because we have to".

Bheema spent a very happy time with her. She pleased him with a thousand ways of love. She took him to many beautiful spots in the forest. With her he saw many rivers, mountains and valleys. He saw the asramas of so many rishis. They all looked at them with affection. Seven months were now gone. Vyaasa came to see them. He

was full of words of comfort to his daughter-in-law, Kunti. He spoke about Hidimbi. He said: "This your dear daughter-in-law will bear a brave son to Bheema. He will be famed all the world over for his valour and his fearlessness. Your son's wife will, henceforth be called Kamalamalini. When a son is born to her, the time of your departure is imminent. Dress yourselves in tree barks and matted hair. You must proceed to the city called Ekachakra. I will meet you there. Your sons are born to rule the world. Ignore these troubled days. They are but passing clouds. Dharma will win in the end. Calm yourselves and go your ways. We are all here to keep watch over you". Vyaasa went away after that.

Seven months passed as seven days. Bheema's son was born. He was named Ghatotkacha. He became the favourite of all his uncles, of Yudhishthira in particular. His love for his nephew was immense. He would spend hours together playing with this child. The time of departure had come. Bheema pacified his weeping wife and said: "Wipe your eyes. You have, with you, our son. Take good care of him. You can see me in him. Whenever I want you, I will think of you. You must come to me at once, with a speed greater than that of thought. But now, we have to go". Hidimbi bade them adieu with tears blinding her eyes. She was so unhappy. Taking up her son in her arms she walked with heavy steps towards the asrama which held such sweet memories for her. She had only these memories to keep her company now.

Dressed in tree barks and deer skins, with their hair matted, the Pandava princes proceeded towards Ekachakra. They did not know what the future held in store for them. It was not in their nature to doubt the words of the elders. Vyaasa had asked them to go to Ekachakra. That was enough for them. They would obey him. Yudhishthira had decided early in his life never to say 'No' to the commands of an elder. Vyaasa was their grandfather. He knew what was good for them. With their minds troubled about the uncertain future, but with a strange sense of peace in their minds, the Pandava princes and their mother proceeded towards the unknown city called Ekachakra.

CHAPTER 30

EKACHAKRA AND THE KILLING OF BAKA

They passed many beautiful spots and rivers. They reached Ekachakra. There they stayed in the house of a brahmin. They earned their food by begging. The people in the city were intrigued by these silent brahmin youths who did not look like beggars. They decided among themselves: "These young men seem to be high-born. They do not seem to be fitted for this life. Perhaps they are here for some unknown reason. They are perhaps disguising themselves for fear of something or someone. Whatever it may be, they distinguish themselves by their behaviour and their devotion to their mother. Let us be good to them".

The Pandavas never left their mother alone for a long time. Collecting their alms they would hurry back to the brahmin's house, and place it at the feet of their mother. Brushing away her tears which were incessant, Kunti would divide it. Half of it would be given to Bheema: he would always be hungry. The rest she would divide among themselves. But poor Bheema was never satisfied. He became thin and pale. There was a potter in the neighbourhood. Bheema would help him by carrying immense loads of clay for him. The potter was so pleased and amazed at the strength of this young man that he made a huge big pot for him. Bheema was pleased with it. He took it with him the next day when they went out to beg for alms. The people smiled indulgently at him and his enormous begging bowl, and filled it up with the tasty food which they had prepared in their homes.

One day Bheema was at home, alone with his mother. The others had gone out. These two were talking about things in general and about the Kauravas in particular. Suddenly they heard the sound of weeping from inside the house. They listened and found that the brahmin, who had given them shelter, was talking to his wife, and they were both weeping. Their curiosity was aroused. They listened more intently but could not make out anything. They only knew that the brahmin and his wife were in trouble. Kunti said: "They have been so good to us. They have given us a home when we were without a home. If it is possible, we must help them when they are in trouble. Bheema, you stay here. I will go and find out what is troubling them".

The brahmin had a son and a daughter. The son was just a child. They were all talking together. Each was saying: "I will go". Kunti could not make out what they were talking about. She went to the

brahmin's wife and said: "I can see that some terrible event is making you unhappy. My son and I could not help overhearing you. If you can tell me your troubles we will try to help you". The brahmin looked at her and said: "You are indeed kind. Your heart is full of sympathy for those who are in trouble. But I am afraid no human being can help us out of the trouble that has visited us. I will, however, tell you about it. In the neighbouring mountain there is a cave. In that cave dwells a cruel rakshasa called Baka. He has been harassing our city for the last thirteen years. He would descend into the plains and kill anyone he found and eat him. The city would be dreading his descent. He would kill indiscriminately. At last, the citizens conferred and went to Baka with a proposal. The deputation said: 'You are striking terror into the hearts of everyone. We are living in constant dread of your attack. We are living just from day to day. If you are willing to listen to us, we have a suggestion to make. Every week you will get a cart-load of excellent food. You will also get a human being every week. We will take turns and arrange to feed you as you desire. But please stop these surprise attacks. You must not come into the city and kill us out of turn. This is the only way in which we can have some peace of mind. We will keep you fed well and regularly. In return for this you must guard our city from intruders from across the mountain'. The rakshasa agreed to this. For the last few years we have followed this rule. From one house one person is chosen. The house has to provide the cart-load of food also. Today we are crying because tomorrow is my turn to go. If I go, my wife and my children will have no one to take care of them. If my wife dies, however, my children will be orphans since I cannot live after she is dead. So we have decided that all of us will go to him and get killed. Life is so sweet that the thought of death is very painful".

Kunti was sorry to see their unhappiness. She said: "Do not worry. None of you need die. You prepare the food. I have five sons. I will send one of them with the food. I wish to repay you for your kindness in giving us a home these many days". The brahmin was indignant. He said: "No, no. You are my guests. Do you think I am selfish enough to sacrifice one of your children in my desire to live? You are so good. I would rather die than commit the sin of killing a brahmin. Please do not speak such words". Kunti smiled and said: "I can assure you that my son is not like ordinary mortals. He is a favourite of the gods. He is very strong and powerful. He will be able to destroy this Baka. Please have faith in me, agree that I may send one of my sons and provide the cart-load of food. I have only one request to make. I do not want you to tell anyone about this. If it is known my son will lose his power". The brahmin and his wife

did not know what to say to this. Kunti spoke with such confidence that they decided to accept this offer.

Kunti went to Bheema and told him everything. He was delirious with joy. He shouted: "Mother, think of it! I will have a cart-load of food! I will do anything. I will kill that rakshasa and rid this city of its terror. But mother, please make sure that there is enough food and please ask the lady of the house to make it tasty. I am very hungry". Kunti laughed and said: "The brahmin's wife is a very good cook and she is very generous. I know it for a fact. Come, let us go and comfort them". Together, they went to the brahmin and told him that Bheema would certainly go to the mountain cave in the morning with the cart-load of food. They returned to their apartment.

Hardly a few moments later, the other four returned with the alms which they had collected. Bheema was sitting in a corner. One look at his face was enough to convince Yudhishthira that he was extremely pleased about something. He was intrigued. Yudhishthira went to his mother and said: "Mother, what has happened? It looks as though my brother is up to some mischief. His face has the same look which he used to have whenever he had played some trick on the sons of Dhritarashtra. I want to know what he is up to now. Has he your permission to do what he is planning to do? Or is he doing it on his own accord?" Kunti said: "No. He is not planning to do anything by himself. In fact he is doing it at my request. I have asked him to do something to help the brahmin who has given us shelter and also to help the people of this city". She narrated to Yudhishthira, in detail, all that had happened during his absence.

For the first time in his life Yudhishthira became very angry with his mother. He spoke to her in a voice which was harsh with pain. He said: "Mother, why did you do this? You know what Bheema means to all of us. It is because of him that we were able to escape from the dreadful house of lac. It was his strength which helped us then. It is because he is here that we are sure of vanquishing the Kauravas some day. He is the star of hope in my dark and dreadful sky. But you have offered him up as a victim for some dreadful monster. Your gratitude to this brahmin need not have assumed this form. Oh mother, you have done a wrong thing. It looks as though this mighty Bheema was born just to be an offering for this terrible Baka. Mother, the sufferings of the past few months have made you lose all sense of proportion. Or else you would not have been so impulsive".

Kunti spoke coldly. She said: "I am not pleased with your words, my son. Please do not consider me to be so foolish. It is because I know the strength of my Bheema that I suggested this plan. I saw

his immense energy when he carried us all for hours together. I was again reminded of something else. I remembered how he killed Hidimba. There is no one in this world who is more powerful than my Bheema. He has drunk the elixir of the serpent gods. When he was a baby, one day, a tiger came near me. This was in the valley of Satasringa. I was sitting in the asrama garden with this child in my lap. Seeing the tiger, I became terrified and got up to flee fast from the spot. In my terror I forgot all about the child in my lap. Hearing my cries of panic, your father came out of the asrama. With his bow and arrow he killed the tiger. I realized that the child had fallen down from my lap and rolled down the slope of the hill. Your father and I rushed to the foot of the hill dreading the sight that was sure to meet our eyes. We saw Bheema sleeping peacefully. The rock on which he had landed had been ground to fine dust. Such is the strength of my son. I know that he will kill this Baka in no time. Do you not know that, if a kshatriya helps a brahmin, his life on this earth will be blessed by those above? I wanted to repay the kindness shown by the brahmin family to us and also the people of the city who have given us food all these days. And it is an easy task for Bheema. Do not let this worry you".

Yudhishthira was ashamed of his hasty words. He begged for pardon. He went to the brahmin and said: "My mother told me about the predicament in which she found you. I am happy to know that she has suggested this plan to you. We are very happy to have this chance of helping you. You need not be upset or worried about this. My brother is a very powerful young man. I will not be surprised if he kills this Baka. As a matter of fact, I will be surprised if he does not kill Baka".

Early in the morning, the brahmin's wife had finished her cooking. She called Bheema and fed him. The cart was then piled high with food. Bheema bade adieu to all of them and went alone towards the cave in the mountain. He was driving the cart himself. Soon he reached the top of the mountain. He was about to call out to the rakshasa. Suddenly he paused. He said to himself: "Here is some lovely food meant for me. The rakshasa thinks that it is meant for him, but it is meant for me. He is not going to eat it. I will kill him before that. Only now I realize that, once I kill him, I will become unclean and I will be unfit to eat. That will be tragic. The best thing for me to do is to eat up all this food first and then summon him to fight with me". He stationed the cart under the shade of a tree and began to eat. He was enjoying himself immensely. His mother was right. The brahmin's wife could cook well. He finished eating: rather, he had almost finished eating.

He called out to the rakshasa. Baka heard the call. He hurried to the place from where the call came. To his consternation, he saw a young brahmin lad eating up all the food meant for him and looking quite unconcerned over it. He came near and said: "Who are you? How dare you eat all the food meant for me?" It looked as though Bheema did not hear him. Smiling to himself, he continued his eating. This was too much for Baka. He rushed up to Bheema and tried to hit him. Bheema was unconcerned. Baka uprooted a tree and he tried to hit Bheema with it. With his left hand Bheema warded off the blow and his right hand was all the while carrying a bowl of curds to his mouth. He had now finished eating. Wiping his mouth with his fore-hand he looked at Baka and said: "You have been living on this city too long. Your body has become too fat. It is time you leave this world. I will help you to reach the abode of Yama. I want to rid this city of you and your cruelty. Come, get ready to fight with me".

Then there took place a terrible fight between Bheema and Baka. It went on for a long time. Baka was immensely powerful. But he was not a match for Bheema who was far his superior. Finally Bheema took Baka in his arms, put him across his knees and broke him in two as an elephant would break a piece of sugar-cane. With a terrible cry of pain Baka fell on the ground, dead. Bheema dragged his body by the legs, intent on installing it near the gates of the city. Seeing Baka dead, Baka's companions approached Bheema. He said: "If you promise not to harass the city any more, I will allow you to go your ways. Or else you will suffer the same fate as your friend". They went away from the city, never to come back.

Quietly, Bheema left the body of Baka at the gateway of the city and went to the house where they were staying. He returned the empty cart to the brahmin and asked him not to talk about the real killer of Baka. Then he went and bathed, and went to sleep. He had eaten too much food!

In the morning, the people of the city were amazed to find the body of Baka in the gateway. They did not know how it had happened. They knew whose turn it was to send food to the rakshasa that day. They came to the brahmin and asked him how it had happened. Already coached by Bheema, the brahmin said: "Seeing me crying, some gifted person from the heavens came and told me that he would carry the food to the monster and kill him too. I did what he asked me to do. He went away. I have not seen him since".

CHAPTER 31

THE BRAHMIN'S STORY

The Pandavas continued to live in the house of the brahmin even after the killing of Baka. One day, a brahmin traveller came to the house of the brahmin to stay for the night. He had been to many countries. They welcomed him. In the night, when their work was all done, they all crowded round him and asked him to tell them about his wanderings and about the interesting things he had seen on the way. They had been alone all these days, and the coming of a stranger from another country was a great event for them. They wanted to know how the world had received the news of the terrible burning of the house of lac and the tragic death of the Pandavas. The brahmin told them about his wanderings and then said: "The real mission, on which I have been made to travel like this, is to tell the world about the swayamvara of a princess. It has been arranged by Drupada, the king of the Panchalas, in his city, Kampilya. The princess is his daughter Draupadi. She was born from the sacred fire along with her brother, Dhrishtadyumna". The Pandavas expressed a desire to hear more details about this swayamvara.

The brahmin said: "There is a very long and interesting story behind the birth of these two and about this swayamvara too. If you are willing to listen, I am willing to talk! There were two friends called Drona and Drupada, who studied together in the asrama of Bharadwaja. When they were together, Drupada told Drona one day that he would share his kingdom with Drona, when he became the king of the Panchalas". The Pandavas knew the story only too well. But, for the sake of courtesy and because they did not have the heart to damp the enthusiasm of the garrulous brahmin who seemed to enjoy telling a story, they did not let him know that they knew. He told them all about the gurudakshina paid by Arjuna, the greatest of the disciples of Drona. "Drupada was amazed and charmed by the prowess of this young man," continued the brahmin. "Indeed, so great was his admiration that he told himself: 'There is no one in the world like Arjuna'. Also, Drupada's hatred for Drona was born in that moment". The brahmin paused for breath. The Pandavas sat up. They did not know this part of the story. This hatred of Drupada, for their Acharya Drona, was news to them. They were now listening intently.

The brahmin continued the story. He said: "The hatred for Drona was born in the heart of Drupada at the moment when Drona ceased

to hate Drupada. It was a strange thing. Drupada could not look on Drona as his friend. He wanted to take revenge for his humiliation. It almost looks as though the hatred left the heart of Drona and leaped into that of Drupada to dwell there for ever. Drupada's only aim was to get a son great enough to kill this man, Drona. No ordinary man could kill him since Drona is a disciple of Bhargava and has in his possession all the divine astras. So Drupada decided to perform a yajna for this purpose. He told himself: 'A son to kill Drona and a daughter as my gift for Arjuna'. He wandered far into the forest. There were two rishis Yaja and Upayaja, whom he approached with his request. After a year spent in pleasing Upayaja, he was told that Yaja would be able to help him. The two rishis performed for him the yaga called Putrakama. At the end of the yaga, there arose a chariot out of the sacrificial fire. Seated in the chariot was a god-like youth. He was dressed in the manner in which a warrior dresses just before he sets out to battle. Drupada was speechless with joy. He knew that the death of Drona was certain. Then followed a great event. There arose out of the fire a very beautiful woman: the prospective gift of Drupada to Arjuna. She was dark and her flashing eyes bewitched everyone. Her eyes were like the petals of the lotus, long and liquid. From her long lustrous hair arose the perfume of the blue lotus. There was no one to equal her in beauty, charm or splendour. Drupada thought that she was a worthy bride for Arjuna. When she appeared, there was a voice from the heavens which proclaimed: 'This woman, who is the most beautiful of all women, will be the cause of the destruction of all kshatriyas. She is born to fulfil a divine purpose'. The children were named Dhrishtadyumna, and Krishnaa better known as Draupadi.

Bheema now spoke. He said: "But I have heard that Dhrishtadyumna is a student of Drona. He learnt archery and the use of all arms from Drona. So they say".

The brahmin said: "Yes. You are right. Drona, knowing that the prince is born to kill him, still taught him everything. He knew that there is no use in fighting fate. Dhrishtadyumna was a good friend of Bheema, one of the Pandavas who were burnt in the house of lac—which brings me back to the reason for my wanderings. The Pandavas, you know, were the sons of Pandu. They were the nephews of King Dhritarashtra who rules in Hastinapura. He is a son of the House of Kurus. But what is the use of being born in such an illustrious race? Dhritarashtra did not behave as a father to the fatherless sons of Pandu. He asked them to spend a few months in Varanavata, a beautiful city. There, he had a house built of lac and he made this house to be burnt and the Pandavas along with it. The Pandavas are now dead, and

their mother too. When Drupada heard about the death of the Pandavas at Varanavata, he was almost mad with grief. He knew that the evil-minded Dhritarashtra, his son Duryodhana and Sakuni, the uncle of Duryodhana, had been the persons who were the cause of this tragedy. It looked as though Drupada was mourning the death of his own sons. So great was his lament. His guru approached him and said: 'Do not grieve so much. I have a feeling that the Pandavas are not dead. The words of the rishis cannot go wrong. Yaja and Upayaja performed the sacrifice for you. Out of the sacrificial fire were your children born. Do you mean to say that the words of the sages can go wrong? The Pandavas have always been righteous. No evil can befall the Pandavas. I will suggest a plan to you. You must have it proclaimed all over this Bharatavarsha that there will be a swayamvara held in the city of Kampilya, in Panchala. You must stipulate a condition for winning the hand of your daughter Draupadi. Let it be a test in archery. The archer in Arjuna can never resist the challenge. I am sure the Pandavas are somewhere, disguised. Arjuna will surely attend the swayamvara and win the hand of Draupadi". Drupada sent out the proclamation to the four quarters. He has asked a large number of us to go from place to place spreading the news that a great swayamvara is to be held in Kampilya. Who knows, somewhere, I may even be telling Arjuna about this event!" With a loud laugh appreciating his own joke, the brahmin said that he was too tired to keep awake any more, and went to sleep.

The princes sat silent for a long time after the brahmin had retired. None of them spoke a word. Kunti looked at them and realized that they all wished to go to Panchala but were unable to say so. She thought that she would make it easier for them. So she said: "We have been living too long in the house of this brahmin. I have become slightly disgusted with looking at the same things everyday. Why should we not think of moving? After hearing the words of this brahmin, my thoughts are turned towards this city of Kampilya in Panchala. They say that Panchala is the land of plenty. We heard too about the swayamvara of the princess. It is sure to be a grand event. There will be a great crowd and it will be amusing to walk about the streets of the city in the midst of all the celebration. There will be a lot of excitement in store for us. I feel a desire to go to Panchala if you are all willing". The Pandavas were only too willing. They were happy at the thought of the adventures ahead of them.

All through the night they did not sleep. They knew that Draupadi was meant for Arjuna. But ever since they heard the description of this woman, the thoughts of all of them were hovering round her. Even

the eldest Pandava Yudhishthira felt that he wanted this woman for himself. He was distressed at these thoughts that haunted him. But he could not help it. He felt it in his blood that something very unusual was about to happen. All the omens indicated that something good was in store for them. Impatiently they waited for the sun to rise.

Kunti took affectionate farewell of the brahmin and his wife and they all six of them set out for the country of Panchala. On the way they met Vyaasa. He had promised to meet them. He blessed them and said: "What you are doing now is right. Panchala should be your destination now. Great good fortune awaits you there. I know the thoughts that are crowding in your minds. I can only say that your wishes will all come true. I will come again to Kampilya. You will need me there. Your dark days are at an end. Happy days are just waiting to be born. The clouds are lifting and you will be happy soon, very soon". With these words of cheer Vyaasa went away. Strangely exhilarated by the words of Vyaasa, the Pandavas walked towards Kampilya, the capital city of Panchala.

CHAPTER 32

THE ADVENT OF DHAUMYA

It was midnight. They were passing the river Ganga. They thought of cooling their limbs in the sweet waters of the river. They went near and began their preparations for the bath. A gandharva was there. He was with his wives, and he resented the intrusion of human beings on his privacy. He tried to stop them. He said: "I am a gandharva. My name is Angaaravarna. It is not proper on your part to enter the river now. This river has always been mine". Arjuna was furious with him for his arrogance and pride. He said: "Listen to me. The sea, the slopes of the mountain and the waters of the river are common to all. You have no right to call this river your own. You are eaten up with conceit. We are strong and powerful. If you try to frighten us, you will not succeed". The gandharva was becoming impatient with these mortals. He said: "Go away from here and do not waste my time and yours. If you do not, I am afraid I will have to use violence and force you to leave the place". Arjuna said: "Please do not be so foolish. If you try to threaten us with your

violence, so can we." The gandharva was now quite angry. He began to shoot arrows at all of them and at Arjuna in particular. Arjuna warded them off with his own. He said: "If you send your arrows against someone who knows nothing of archery, then, perhaps, they may be effective. As for me, I know all that you know and much more too. Your arrows give the appearance of foam on the surface of the sea. They are childish and ineffectual". The gandharva was bent on sending arrow after arrow.

Arjuna's patience had worn out. He sent the astra called Agneya, the astra presided over by Agni, the god of fire. It went spitting fire and burnt the chariot of the gandharva. Arjuna caught him and pulled him out of the chariot. The wives of the gandharva fell at the feet of Yudhishthira and begged him for mercy. At the commands of his brother, Arjuna released the gandharva. He was now all penitence. He said: "I have been defeated by an ordinary mortal. Till now I was called Chitraratha because of my very beautiful chariot. But from now I will call myself Dagdharatha since my chariot has been burnt by a man". The gandharva wanted to make friends with them. He wanted to learn the incantations for the astra which burnt his chariot. In exchange, he gave Arjuna the power to see the happenings in all the three worlds. He gave beautiful horses that knew no fatigue. He learnt who they were. He was happy to know that the Pandavas were alive. He offered them a suggestion. He said: "You are going to be lords of this earth. It is necessary for you tc have a guru, a kulaguru. You will need him. It is but fitting that kings should have high-priests. With the help of a brahmin to advise you, you will rule the earth as your fathers did". The Pandavas asked him to suggest a priest. The gandharva suggested Dhaumya. Arjuna thanked him and said: "As for your gift of horses, let them remain with you. When the dark days of my brothers are over, when circumstances have changed, I will claim them from you". They took affectionate farewell of him. The Pandavas then went in search of Dhaumya.

Dhaumya was very pleased with their humility and behaviour. He agreed to be their guru. They felt that the dark clouds were lifting, and their hearts were light. With quickened steps they hurried towards Panchala where, according to Vyaasa, great good fortune awaited them.

Chapter 33

KAMPILYA

The Pandavas arrived in the city called Kampilya. They stayed in the house of a potter. Their daily food was still the alms which they collected by begging. In the course of their daily wanderings throughout the city they heard a lot of news. The people said: "Our king is certain that the Pandavas are alive. He has been told by the rishis that Draupadi will be the bride of Arjuna. The king has therefore placed a mighty bow in the swayamvara hall. There is also placed a target which is a fish fixed to the ceiling of the hall. The fish is always rotating and the person who wins the hand of Draupadi is the one who will fell this target with five arrows. It will not be possible for just ordinary archers to tackle that target. Only Arjuna can do it. Let us wait for the day of the swayamvara. In that great hall something dramatic is sure to happen". Everyone was waiting impatiently for the day of the swayamvara.

Kings from all over Bharatavarsha had assembled in the great city in response to the proclamation of the king. The Pandavas were there disguised as brahmins. The Kaurava hosts, with Duryodhana and Radheya in the lead, had already arrived. All the Yadavas, Bhojas, Vrishnis and Andhakas were there. The chief among them was Balarama, Krishna and their cousins. Special mansions had been erected to accommodate the guests from all over the world.

It was the day of the swayamvara. The hall was splendid. It was decorated like the hall of Indra. With flowers and perfumes everywhere, the guests were caught in a web of pleasure and happy anticipation. The kings, rivals all of them, had already arrived. Lions among men, with their powerful arms and shoulders, the kings filled the immense hall and beautified it. It was an unforgettable, momentous scene. The sky was crowded with the denizens of the heavens intent on seeing this swayamvara. All were eager to see the beautiful Draupadi and the man who was to be her lord. The brahmins sat in their places. The Pandavas were there, scattered among them. They had arrived, one by one, without attracting the attention of anyone.

All eyes were turned towards the entrance hall. Dhrishtadyumna led his lovely sister to the hall. She was dressed in rich and beautiful silk. Golden ornaments added beauty to her graceful figure. She carried the garland of flowers in her hand. Dhrishtadyumna led her to the stage that was built at the centre of the hall.

The word "STAGE" is used by the poet here. It is singularly apt. With Draupadi installed on the stage, the first Act of the tragedy was to be played. She was to be in the lead all the time. Several years would have to pass before the last Act. She would fulfil the purpose for which she was born, the destruction of all the kshatriyas. But that was a long time after today. Now, with the appearance of Draupadi on the stage, the first Act of the play had begun.

Sacred mantras were chanted. Oblations were poured into the fire. Absolute silence now prevailed in the hall. Dhrishtadyumna ascended the stage. In a voice like the low rumbling of a thunder cloud he addressed the assembly: "Please give me your attention. Here is the bow. Here are the five arrows. With these five arrows the target has to be hit and felled to the ground. The person who is able to perform this difficult feat will win my sister Draupadi's hand. This is my solemn promise".

Dhrishtadyumna then advanced to his sister. He spoke to her the names of the several kings who had come there. He said: "Draupadi, look at all these kings who have assembled here to win your hand. I will tell you the names and point them out to you. There sits the noble Kuru prince, Duryodhana. His brothers are all there, by his side. There is Radheya, the dear beloved friend of Duryodhana. He is the greatest archer. Here is Sakuni and these are his famous sons. There you can see Aswatthama, the powerful son of Drona". Dhrishtadyumna showed them all to her one by one. Jarasandha, Salya, Bhagadatta and many other heroes were there. He said: "There sits Balarama the son of Rohini. By his side sits Krishna, the son of Devaki. The other heroes of the great Vrishni House are there: Samba, Sarana, Gada, Satyaki and Kritavarma." She was shown Jayadratha, the lord of the Sindhus. His wife was Dussala, the sister of Duryodhana. Sisupala, the king of the Chedis was there.

The kings went near the bow one by one. The bow was divine. It was called Kindhura. Its string was of steel. It was a very hard task to bend the bow and string it. Kings went near it with hopes high in their hearts. Unable to tackle it, they returned crest-fallen. The Yadava hosts, however, had decided to be just the audience. Not one of them got up to try for the hand of Draupadi. Krishna's eyes were roving round the assembly. Finally they came to rest on the forms of the Pandavas who sat scattered about among the brahmins. Quietly he drew his brother's attention. He said: "Look there, brother. Look at those brahmins, five of them, sitting there. They, I am sure, are the Pandavas hiding their princely forms in the serene dress of brahmins. They look like live coals covered by ashes. The heroes are alive and they are here. Let us wait and see what happens now". A sweet

smile lit up the face of Krishna. It was because he knew that the Pandavas would be living somewhere, that he had forbidden the Yadava hosts from competing in the contest.

The tournament went on. King after king tried and failed. But some of them very nearly succeeded. Sisupala, for instance, missed the mark by the width of a sesame seed. The bow flung him down. He returned to his seat with disappointment burning his frame. The next person who was also very nearly successful was Jarasandha. He missed the mark by the size of a mustard seed. Duryodhana rose up from his seat. He walked majestically towards the bow. He tried to hit the fish. He missed by the width of a little finger. Salya missed by the width of a bean seed. All the kings began to lose hope since the great archers were all unable to hit the target. Radheya now walked towards the stage. He looked wonderful as he walked like a panther across the hall towards the stage. Krishna was looking on with grave concern when he bent the bow and strung it. Radheya was taking aim. All the kings were matching him tense with excitement. Krishna did not dare to breathe. Everyone was sure that he would do it. Now that Arjuna was dead, there was no one to equal Radheya, the disciple of Bhargava. It was a pleasure to watch him bend the bow and string it effortlessly. He took aim and sent the five shafts. They missed the mark by just the breadth of a hair. Krishna sighed a great sigh of relief. Silence reigned in the entire hall. No one dared to try after even Radheya failed.

Chapter 34

DRAUPADI'S SWAYAMVARA

Like a sudden flame leaping up from a heap of ashes, Arjuna stood up. It was a startling sight. Krishna was waiting for this. He took his brother's hand in his and squeezed it in his excitement. He smiled and looked at the brahmin as if to say: "The hand of Draupadi has been won by the right man". All eyes were turned towards this young brahmin. No one in that hall knew who he was, no one except Krishna, Balarama, Dhaumya, Bheeshma and the Pandavas themselves. Arjuna ascended the stage and addressed Dhrishtadyumna: "Is a brahmin allowed to try and fell the target? It looks as though no kshatriya is able to tackle this Matsya Yantra". His eyes swept the entire hall with a look half amused and half contemptuous. Dhrishtadyumna

said: "Why, certainly! Anyone is at liberty to try; whoever he may be, whether he is a brahmin, a kshatriya, a vaisya or even a sudra. I suppose you know what is to be done? With these five arrows you must fell the fish which is revolving so high up in the ceiling. If you do it, my sister will be your bride. I assure you, I am sincere in my promise".

Arjuna approached the great bow. He made a pradakshina to it. He prostrated before it. Then, with a slight smile on his lips, he took up the bow in his hand. He strung it. After twanging the string, he sent the five arrows in quick succession. The target was hit in a moment. The Matsya which had baffled all of them so long, fell on the ground.

There was a terrific uproar in the hall. The brahmins were all so excited at the thought that a brahmin could do what the kshatriyas could not. Flowers rained on Arjuna from the sky. With the gait of a swan, Draupadi walked up to Arjuna and placed the garland on his neck. The hall was resounding with the blare of conchs and trumpets and all the musical instruments. The sky resounded with the music of all the heavenly instruments. Arjuna and Draupadi made a beautiful pair, like Indra with Sachi, like Agni and Swaha, like Vishnu with Lakshmi, like the Sun with Usha, like Manmatha and Rati, like Lord Sankara with Uma, like Rama and Seeta, like Nala and Damayanti. Arjuna took Draupadi by the hand and descended from the stage. The king Drupada was pleased to see that the young man was very handsome and looked noble.

The kings were, for a moment, nonplussed. Then their anger showed itself. They said: "This Drupada has insulted us deliberately. When so many kings have assembled here, he has insulted us by giving his daughter to a brahmin. If no one could hit the target, his daughter should have killed herself rather than be wedded to a brahmin. We cannot brook this insult. This act of the king must not go unpunished. Let us attack him and kill him". Drupada was upset at this anger of the other kings. He looked at the young brahmin who was the cause of all this. Arjuna smiled reassuringly at him, and said: "Please do not fear. I am able to handle all of them". Bheema came and stood near Arjuna. He uprooted a tree which was near, and was ready to fight alongside his brother. Arjuna stood firm with Bheema by his side. Draupadi stood clinging to the deer skin which Arjuna was wearing. In the meantime Yudhishthira and the twins went home to tell Kunti that Arjuna had won the hand of Draupadi. They returned and joined the brothers.

All the while, Krishna was watching them. He spoke to his brother

Balarama: "Look, brother, the one who bent the bow and won the hand of Draupadi is, of course, Arjuna. This young man, who looks so powerful, must be Bheema, this young man who just uprooted a tree. He is reputed to be very strong. These two dark men, who look very much alike, these handsome men, must be Nakula and Sahadeva. This gentle-looking young man, with the fine kind eyes and noble brow, must be Yudhishthira. I am sure of it, as sure as I am that I am Krishna and you are Balarama. Fortunately the Pandavas are saved from that dreadful house of lac".

The brahmins who had assembled there said: "Young man, do not mind these kings. We are all here to help you. You must fight with them". Arjuna smiled a gentle smile of thanks and said: "You can all watch. I will be able to handle them myself". With Bheema to help him, he stood ready to fight. He was prepared for the onslaught of the many kings who were approaching them. Yudhishthira and the twins joined the two brothers Arjuna and Bheema. The five fought with all the kings who were attacking them. Salya was accosted by Bheema, Duryodhana by Yudhishthira, and Sakuni by the youngster Nakula. There were no chariots. The fight was on the spur of the moment. Duryodhana and the rest of them thought that it would be an easy task to subdue this brahmin. But the arrows of Arjuna surprised them all. Seeing it, Radheya hurried to the spot.

Arjuna and Radheya fought with each other. They were equally matched. They fought with great vigour. Radheya was all admiration for this unknown archer, and he expressed his delight. Radheya was the flower of chivalry. He said: "Whoever you are, young brahmin, I am pleased with your skill. Who are you? Are you the great Bhargava? Are you Indra? Or are you the great Lord Vishnu himself? You must be one of these three who has come to Kampilya to show his prowess to the world. I have never met my equal so far. No one has been able to meet me in fight. Only one was able to do it: that is Arjuna, and he is dead. I am Radheya, the lord of the Angas. I am a great archer. I am a disciple of Bhargava. But I must admit my defeat at your hands. Tell me who you are". Arjuna said: "Radheya, I am happy to know you and I thank you for your words of praise. I am not the famed Bhargava, your guru, nor Vishnu nor Indra, nor any other famous archer. I am an ordinary man, a brahmin, as you see. Like you, I too learnt my archery at the feet of a brahmin. Come, let us continue to fight". So saying, Arjuna cut the string of Radheya's bow. "You have won", said the noble Radheya and withdrew.

The fight went on between the other pairs. Salya was being harassed by Bheema. After defeating him, Bheema left Salya alive. It was not surprising that Bheema should have let him off so easily. Salya

was the uncle of Nakula and Sahadeva. And that was the reason why Bheema did not want to kill him. The fight between Yudhishthira and Duryodhana was one of the high-lights of the day. Yudhishthira hurt the prince with sharp arrows. Duryodhana looked like a cobra which had been wounded with a blunt stick. He fought back valiantly. But it was not of any use. The mildness of Yudhishthira had vanished. Perhaps he remembered the injustice done to them by this cousin of theirs. Nothing else could account for the fury with which he fought. Arjuna and Bheema were amazed to see this new Yudhishthira. They had never seen him so angry before.

The entire army was routed. The Pandavas were free to go home. Seeing the Kuru hosts with Radheya defeated, the other kings were standing there, undecided, when Krishna intervened. He said: "I do not think it is right to fight. After all, this brahmin has won the hand of Draupadi by fair means. He asked Dhrishtadyumna if brahmins were allowed to try. The Panchala prince said: 'Whoever he may be, whether he is a brahmin, a kshatriya, a vaisya or even a sudra, he is allowed to try. If he wins, my sister will be his bride.' When these words were spoken by Dhrishtadyumna, none of us objected. Now, to fight because this brahmin is the better man does not become princes born of noble houses. Let us all refrain from further fighting". The kings were sure that they stood no chance against these unknown brahmins. They were all willing to take the advice of Krishna. They went away, curious about the identity of the brahmins.

The Pandavas, followed by Draupadi, reached the house of the potter, where their mother was waiting for them. They announced their coming with the words: "Mother, we have brought a bhiksha". Kunti was inside the house. She did not see them. As usual, she said: "All of you can share whatever bhiksha you have brought". She then came out and saw the lovely Draupadi standing beside Arjuna. Yudhishthira said: "This maiden was won by our brother in the tournament. We meant her when we said, 'Bhiksha'." Kunti was horrified at the words she had spoken. Hiding her discomfiture, she embraced the young girl who stood bashfully silent. She said: "You are welcome to our home. Come in my child". Draupadi fell at her feet and took the dust of her feet. Kunti led her in.

Later, Kunti came to Yudhishthira and said: "My son, what is this I have spoken? I have never once spoken a lie; nor have I done anything wrong. These words of mine have been spoken. I do not know what is to happen". There was silence for a few moments. Yudhishthira then pacified her and said: "Please do not worry, mother. I will see that nothing happens". He looked at Arjuna and said: "You

have won her hand. It is but right that you should wed her". Arjuna said: "Please do not say so. You are the eldest. You must take her. After you, my beloved brother Bheema is here. He should marry. I come only after that. I leave it to you to untangle this knot and make the final decision". Yudhishthira pondered for a few moments and said: "Mother has said that we should all share Draupadi. She has spoken. There is nothing more sacred than the words of mother. She is our guru. Let us obey her. I have never thought wrongly all these years. And, it is evident that all five of us love this woman whom you have won. Let us all marry her. I feel that I am not committing any sin in suggesting this to you. I feel that my decision is right. Let us not worry about it any more".

Chapter 35

THE LORD MEETS THE PANDAVAS

When the great swayamvara hall emptied itself, Krishna, accompanied by Balarama, went to the house of the potter where the Pandavas were staying. There he saw the famous brothers. He had not met them before. Glowing like fire, they sat round their mother. Krishna entered and fell at the feet of Kunti. He went next to Yudhishthira and prostrated before him. He said: "I am Krishna, the son of Vasudeva". It was a momentous meeting. If we call the entrance of the beautiful Draupadi as the first Act of the great drama, then this meeting of the Pandavas and Krishna can indeed be called the second Act. At that instant was forged a friendship that nothing could equal except, perhaps, the friendship between Duryodhana and Radheya. Balarama prostrated before Kunti and Yudhishthira, and said: "I am Balarama, the son of Rohini". The other Pandavas saluted him. He embraced his student Bheema. Bheema was a little older than Krishna, but younger than Balarama. Arjuna and Krishna were of the same age.

Krishna smiled at them all and said: "I am happy to see my aunt Kunti and my cousins safe and well. I am pleased to know that you have all escaped from that dreadful house of lac". Yudhishthira spoke sweet words of welcome and then asked Krishna how he knew that they were the Pandavas. Again that sweet smile! Krishna said: "Even if it is concealed, fire cannot lose its lustre. Who but the Pandavas can achieve what they have achieved today! I am indeed extremely happy

to have seen you all. Please be careful about yourselves for some time more. Do not let the sons of Dhritarashtra know who you are, not just yet, anyway! They will know it when it is safe for you to be known. We will now take leave of you and return to our mansion. We will meet again". The two brothers took leave of them and went back to their mansion.

Drupada was sunk in the depths of sorrow. He had planned the swayamvara solely with the purpose of bringing Arjuna out of his disguise. He found that some brahmin had won the hand of his dear daughter. The youth was noble, no doubt. He was a great fighter too, which was unusual in a brahmin. He had routed the Kaurava army in such a short time. He had defeated the great Radheya. But he was not Arjuna. Drupada asked his son Dhrishtadyumna to follow the brahmins and find out who they were. He wanted to know more about them. He said: "What have I done? I thought that I was cleverer than fate. I was sure that Arjuna would win the hand of my child. I feel that I have done her a great injustice. This swayamvara should not have been arranged. I should have waited for the coming of Arjuna. I have now, because of my foolishness, thrown away a beautiful gem on a dust heap. If she is insulted I will never be able to live". Dhrishtadyumna comforted his father who was lamenting thus, and said: "Father, do not give way to despair. I feel that something wonderful is about to happen to us. I cannot define it. I will follow these brahmins and find out who they are and where they come from. Please do not worry about my sister. She is sure to be happy with the young man whom she garlanded today".

Dhrishtadyumna followed the Pandavas at a distance. He stood outside the house and, seeing without being seen, watched and heard all that was happening inside. Evening drew near. The five brahmin youths went out and came back with the alms they had collected. They gave it to their mother. She spoke to Draupadi: "Apportion some of it for brahmins who may come in search of food. The rest should be divided into two portions. One portion should be given to this dark young man. He is always hungry". A tender smile lit up the face of the mother. Draupadi hid a smile after looking at Bheema who was so embarrassed. Kunti continued: "The rest should be divided among all of us". Draupadi did as she was bid. Dhrishtadyumna looked at her as she ate the alms for which these men had begged. He saw that she was very happy. She did not look sad or upset. He was surprised to see the happiness in her eyes and the smile that lurked at the corner of her lips.

The sun had set. Still Dhrishtadyumna looked on. The young men now spread Kusa grass on the floor. They lay down to sleep.

Kunti lay down at the head and Draupadi lay down at the feet of these men. Dhrishtadyumna came nearer to hear what they were talking about. Their conversation was strange. It was not the talk of brahmins. They talked about arms, weapons, astras and the like, as though they were quite at home in those things. Dhrishtadyumna was quite sure that they were not brahmins. He was so very excited. He went back to the palace.

He went to his father and said: "Father, do not grieve. They are not brahmins". He related to his father all that had happened in the house of the potter, and added: "I have a feeling that they are the Pandavas. I saw an elderly lady whom they all hold in great honour. I think she is Kunti Devi. The young man who won Draupadi must be Arjuna. The other strong man who uprooted a tree and fought with it must be Bheema. They have disguised themselves well. But once the doubt came to my mind, I thought that I could recognize them. I am sure it was Bheema I saw there. I think it was Yudhishthira who defeated Duryodhana. There were two young men who resembled each other so very much. I am almost sure that they are Nakula and Sahadeva. They talked about all the things that only kshatriya heroes know. I am certain that they are kshatriyas; and what is more, I am sure they are the Pandavas. I feel that the Pandavas have escaped from the house of lac. They are alive and they have come to Panchala. They must have heard the proclamation and hurried to our city".

Drupada did not dare to believe that it was true. He sent purohits from the palace to the house of the Pandavas. He sent them costly dresses and gifts. He sent word that the arrangements for the wedding had to be made and that it would be better if they all came to the palace with their mother and Draupadi. Hope was burning in the heart of Drupada. He felt that the words of the rishis could not be false and that Draupadi's hand had been claimed by Arjuna and only Arjuna.

Chapter 36

"ALL FIVE OF US WILL MARRY YOUR DAUGHTER"

The Pandavas with Kunti and Draupadi arrived in the palace. Drupada received them with great excitement and happiness. Kunti took the hand of Draupadi and went to the inner apartments to join the women of the house.

Drupada made the five young men sit on seats covered with rich material. Looking at the brahmins who were so casual about the grandeur of the reception given to them, the king knew that they were familiar with the atmosphere of a palace. While passing the many halls they paused only when they passed the hall where the weapons were kept. Their eyes gleamed as though they were familiar with these. The king noticed this too. Looking at them who walked like panthers the king knew that they were not brahmins. After they were all comfortably seated, Drupada said: "We do not know who you are. You are all very brave. Beyond that we know nothing. Please tell us about yourselves". Yudhishthira thought that the time had come when they could safely announce themselves. He said: "Please do not worry. We are not brahmins. We are all kshatriyas. We are the sons of Pandu who was a son of the Kuru House. I am the eldest of the five. My name is Yudhishthira. This is Bheema. The young man who won the hand of your daughter is Arjuna. These two are Nakula and Sahadeva, the sons of Maadri. Your daughter has left a lake of lotuses only to enter another lake of lotuses. She will find happiness in our house".

Drupada was dumb with joy. Dhrishtadyumna rushed to Bheema and embraced him. The old king Drupada was speechless with emotion. Tears choked his voice and ran down his cheeks. He composed himself and said: "I am overcome with joy. I do not know what to say. Please recount to me how you escaped from the house of lac and what you have been doing all these days". Yudhishthira told him all about their many adventures. Drupada offered them his kingdom and said: "You need fear the Kauravas no more. We are all here to aid you". After talking about so many things the king said: "We must hurry with the arrangements for the wedding of my daughter with Arjuna". Yudhishthira said: "I am the eldest son of Pandu. I have to be married first". "If that is the case," said the king, "you are certainly welcome to marry my daughter. I will consider it a great honour to have you as my son". Yudhishthira smiled and said: "Please do not be amazed at my proposal. We will, all of us, marry your daughter. She will be the wife of the five Pandavas".

Drupada was very much upset by the words of Yudhishthira. He did not want to offend the powerful Pandavas. But this proposal was against all Dharma. He said: "But that is impossible. A man is allowed to take more than one wife. But a woman cannot have more than one husband. This has been the Dharma set down by our ancients. I do not know how I can countenance this. It is wrong. It is immoral". Yudhishthira said: "I can understand your distress. What you say

is right. It is not the custom for a woman to have more than one husband. But we are different. We have always shared everything. We have always been together and nothing can come between us; nothing can separate us. And again, there is our mother. She has never spoken a wrong word. When we went home with your daughter she said: 'All of you share the Bhiksha'. To us, our mother means more than all the dharmasastras put together. As for this marriage being wrong, I have heard of many occasions when rishis are said to have shared the same woman. The daughter of the sage Jatila had seven husbands. There are several other instances. I feel that this my suggestion is not against Dharma. I have never thought unworthy thoughts; nor has my mother. So, you may rest assured that it is quite right". Drupada was not pacified by these dubious arguments of Yudhishthira. He was at a loss as to what he should do.

Vyaasa came then. They all looked to him for helping them out of this predicament. Drupada welcomed him with great reverence. He was honoured by the visit of this great man. Vyaasa was the home of wisdom. He was the personification of righteousness. After they were all seated, Drupada told him about his dilemma. Vyaasa smiled at him and said: "That is the reason for my coming. I want to know all your opinions on the subject". He heard it all, and said: "No doubt, what Drupada says is true. This custom of a woman taking more than one husband has not been common in recent times. But it has been done before. There is also the sanction of divine beings in this instance. Draupadi, in her previous birth, prayed to Lord Sankara and he had granted her five husbands in her next birth. I know the secret that is beyond the veil. I am not allowed to tell you what it is. But you can take my word for it, Drupada, you will not be doing anything against Dharma in allowing this marriage. There will not be any lapse of Dharma". Drupada had to be satisfied with these words. The great Vyaasa had sanctioned the marriage. He agreed to this unusual marriage of one woman with five men.

On an auspicious day, when the moon was in conjunction with the star Rohini, the five brothers married Draupadi. The sons of Pandu were now secure from fear of the sons of Dhritarashtra. With Drupada and his son, the fire-born Dhrishtadyumna, to support them, and with the Vrishnis led by Krishna to side with them, they had nothing to worry about. They spent happy days in the court of Drupada in the city Kampilya.

CHAPTER 37

PANIC IN THE KAURAVA COURT

News spread like wild fire: the news that the Pandavas were alive, that they were now the sons-in-law of the powerful king Drupada; that the brahmin who won the hand of Draupadi was Arjuna. The feelings of the Kauravas can easily be imagined. It was terrible news for them. Sakuni was furious. The escape of the Pandavas from Varanavata was a greater miracle than Bheema's escape from death when he was made to be stung by snakes. Sakuni suggested that they should challenge the Pandavas and fight with them. Some of the elders said that it would not be politic to do so. They said: "The Pandavas are not helpless as they were till now. They have Drupada, Dhrishtadyumna, Krishna, Balarama and the entire hosts of the Vrishni house to help them. It is better to make it up with them". Radheya said: "No doubt, there is a lot to be said about the strength of the Pandavas. But to divide the mind this way and that is not proper for kshatriyas. If we want supremacy, now is the time for it. They may be powerful now. But we are not all women. We can fight. It is now or never. Let us all descend on the country of the Panchalas and challenge the Pandavas. We can vanquish them easily". This warlike speech of Radheya pleased most of them. An army was collected and there was a march to Kampilya.

The war was of short duration and decisive result. The Kaurava army was routed. The wrath of the Pandavas was like that of a snake which had been hurt. They proved too strong for the Kauravas. Duryodhana and his army returned to Hastinapura. He had to get used to the fact that the Pandavas were more powerful than he had thought. His heart was near the point of breaking. He would not talk to anyone; not even to his brothers and his friends. He sat alone, for hours together, in his apartments and pondered on the way he had been cheated by Providence. He thought of nothing else but the Pandavas. Dussasana went to him to comfort him. To him he poured out his grief. Duryodhana said: "Whoever thought that Purochana would bungle like this? He was a fool. Indeed, the Pandavas are favoured by the gods. Else, how can we explain the fact that the great Radheya was defeated twice by that conceited ass, Arjuna? When they were sent to Varanavata I was sure that we would see them no more. But here they are, stronger than ever. I have realized that fate, after all, is too powerful. Strength and arms stand no chance against fate". Duryo-

dhana's grief could not be described. He was on the point of losing his senses.

Vidura heard all the news. He also heard of the stupid way in which the Kauravas again attacked the Pandavas, and their humiliating defeat. He went to his brother Dhritarashtra and said: "It is indeed very very fortunate that the children of the Kuru House are flourishing". Vidura used the name 'Kuru' deliberately, to see the reaction of the king. He continued, "The eldest son has now married the daughter of the king of the Panchalas". The king fell into the trap. He was very pleased and said: "Why have you not brought her before me? Indeed, as you say, it is fortunate that the sons of the House of Kuru are flourishing". Vidura said: "My dear brother, from your tone I can see that you have misunderstood me. You seem to be under the impression that the daughter of the king of the Panchalas has chosen your son Duryodhana as her husband. I am sorry. When I said 'The sons of the House of Kuru', I meant the sons of Pandu. They are also the sons of the House of Kuru. Arjuna won the hand of the princess in the swayamvara, and now all five of them have taken her for wife". The king had to hide his disappointment from Vidura. He composed himself and for the sake of decorum said: "It is even more pleasing news. I am very happy to know that those well-behaved children have won relationship with the powerful and invincible Drupada and his son. I am very happy to know that the sons of my dead brother are alive and well. I have never been so happy as I am today. Embrace me, Vidura". As he was saying this, Vidura smiled to himself and said: "My lord, your words are now very sweet and affectionate. I hope they are not like foam on the surface of water. I only hope that the feelings you have expressed are deep-rooted and will remain so for ever! I hope your mind will not waver any more". Vidura left him and went away.

Even as he was leaving, Duryodhana entered the palace of the king and with him was Radheya. They heard the latter part of the conversation between the king and Vidura. At once Duryodhana began his tirade. He said: "I am surprised, father. What is all this I hear about the great joy in your heart on hearing that those hated cousins of mine are alive? Are you dreaming? Are you not well?" The king said: "I am more upset than you are. The rise of the Pandavas is not pleasing to me. But I could not say it to Vidura. He is very astute. So I make it a point to praise the sons of Pandu in front of Vidura. He will not be able to find out my real feelings. Now that you are here, tell me what should be done".

Poor Duryodhana could not think of anything practicable. He said: "This hated team of five brothers has got to be broken. It should

be done at all costs. Can we not bring dissension among them? Can we not bribe King Drupada with costly gifts and make him friendly with us? Can nothing be done to make the beautiful Draupadi the cause of dissension among the brothers? Or, why should we not try and arrange to kill Bheema? He is the strongest of the five. If he dies, their spirit will be broken. Arjuna is powerful because he is always backed up by Bheema in all his fights. If Bheema should die, it will be child's play for my Radheya to kill Arjuna. Father, something must be done. Or, why not we try and influence Draupadi against the brothers? Then, with Drupada and Dhrishtadyumna against them, the Pandavas can do nothing. These are some of my suggestions. If Radheya approves of any of these, let us adopt it and act quickly. As it is, time is passing. I, for one, cannot live if they come back to Hastina and live with us".

Radheya smiled at his friend. He said: "Duryodhana, my friend, you have taken leave of your senses. I am sure of it. Or else you would not have thought up these fantastic things. Your attempts at treachery are all futile. From the beginning, by the advice of your uncle Sakuni, you have tried underhand methods. Have they succeeded? No! Not one! You cannot bring dissension among them. They are very much attached to each other. Nothing can come between them. They are too good at heart to be jealous of each other. They cannot be led astray. As for your suggestion that Drupada can be tempted with bribes, that is impossible too. Drupada is too well reputed for his upright nature. Nor can Draupadi, his daughter, be won over. Do you not know that by nature, a woman will be happy to have more than one husband? Draupadi has five. She will never be unhappy enough to be moved against her husbands. You cannot kill Bheema either. You have tried to, more than once, years back. You could not do it. My suggestion is, fight. Why should we adopt these foolish plans? Let us fight them. They will become more powerful as the days pass by. We must fight and remove the obstacle. The sooner we do it, the better. Fighting is the only honourable way that I can think of. This wide, wide world, my dear Duryodhana, can be wooed, not by deceit but by valour. It is not right that such a great noble prince like you should resort to methods employed by women and cowards. You are a kshatriya. You have us. We are prepared to lay down our lives for you. In after years, it is the valour of a king that lives after him. These rules of Saama, Daana, Bheda are all ineffective. You must use the fourth one, Danda. Challenge the Pandavas to fight with you. Then enjoy the kingdom which you have won with your bravery. Do not try to demean yourself by these crooked thoughts so typical of your uncle Sakuni. You are easily led. Follow me, and I will lead you into

the honourable path trodden by real kshatriyas. Fight, my friend. I do not want men in future times to talk ill of you, my beloved friend".

Dhritarashtra was pleased with the words of Radheya. He said: "A hero like you can speak only such words. You cannot think in any other manner. But today there is to be a conference in the great palace hall. Bheeshma, Drona and all the Kuru elders will be there to discuss the future of the Pandavas and the Kauravas. I hope your suggestions will please them. But I am afraid that they will not be favoured by them. Anyway, let us proceed to the council hall and see what the talk is going to be like and what the final decision is to be".

The three of them went slowly towards the council hall.

Chapter 38

THE ASSEMBLY HALL

They were all there: Bheeshma, Drona, Kripa, Baahlika, Somadatta, Vidura and the others. Bheeshma began to talk in his deep sonorous voice: "It is not proper to nurse anger against the Pandavas any longer. It is not right to hate them. Dhritarashtra and Pandu are both my nephews, and their sons are equally dear to me. Duryodhana is as dear to me as Yudhishthira. It pains me to see the state of affairs. I feel it is time we do the right thing by the sons of Pandu. They are fatherless children. Duryodhana, my child, they have as much right as you have, over this ancient kingdom of the Kurus. You must ask them to come here and share this big kingdom with you. That is the course of action which will win for you everlasting fame. Any other idea of yours will only end in unhappiness and, more than that, infamy for you and your name in after years. In this short span of life that is granted to us, my child, a good name should be jealously guarded. It is the only thing worthwhile. Once you lose your good name, your life will be just a waste. You live as long as your good name lives. You perish when you lose it in the eyes of men. Do what befits a noble prince like you. It looks as though fate has given you a second chance. This is a unique opportunity. Fate is usually so relentless. Like the spoken word, like the lost chance, fate never comes back to redress a wrong done. But in your case, fate has been kind. God has allowed the Pandavas to live after the accident of the house of lac. I choose to call it an accident. Kunti is alive, the five brothers are all alive. The sinful Purochana is, fortunately for you, dead. If you behave with

affection towards the Pandavas, this stigma attached to your name and that of your father, imputing the burning of the house of lac to you both, will all be washed away. Now is the chance to do something to establish your reputation. You are a good man. You can understand the ways of Dharma. You must do this for your own good. Give half the kingdom to the Pandavas, and rest in peace".

Drona got up. He was also of the same opinion. He said: "It is the best thing to do. Let the king send messengers to the court of Drupada with gifts. The sons of Kunti must be pacified and they must be asked to come here, to Hastinapura. It is the duty of the king to be kind to these orphans".

Radheya was not for this unnatural friendliness on the part of the Kauravas. He was for fighting. He propounded the theory that on the battle-field should be decided who should rule the entire world.

Vidura got up and said: "My dear brother, all of us here are your well-wishers. We really want to save your reputation and that of your son. The great Bheeshma and Drona have spoken what is correct. Please do not pay any attention to Radheya. He is so impulsive. He is as full of wrath as your son. Duryodhana and Radheya do not realize the gravity of the situation. It may please you more, I know, to listen to their words than mine. But you have got to listen to me. The burning of the house of lac has stamped your name with the seal of ignominy. Now is the chance to cleanse your soul of all evil thoughts. Apart from the fact that it is proper for you to give half the kingdom to the Pandavas, there is this other fact. It is not advisable to antagonise them. They are now strong. It is not as in the past when they were helpless in your hands. Drupada and his son, the fire-born Dhrishtadyumna, are their relations by marriage. They now have the support of Balarama and Krishna. With Krishna on their side they will surely be invincible. Who can equal the strong and powerful Bheema and his wrath? Who can defy Arjuna? Some of the kings tried twice very recently and found that it was not possible. Again and again, I tell you that peaceful methods should be adopted for the sake of the peace of the kingdom. Duryodhana and his Radheya are too young to appreciate my words. But you are different. It will be a fine gesture on your part if you take the advice of Bheeshma, your uncle. Send for the Pandavas and do what is right".

Dhritarashtra said: "I agree to all that you have all said. I am really of the opinion that the Pandavas should be treated well. It is fortunate that they are alive to enjoy their birthright". The king asked Vidura to carry his message to Panchala. Dhritarashtra was forced to take the advice of the elders. He could not defy them and listen to

his son Duryodhana. He had not yet become quite so hardened against the Pandavas. There was still a spark of decency in his heart.

Vidura went to Panchala. He was honoured by Drupada and the Pandavas. When the Kauravas tried to fight with the Pandavas after their identity had been revealed, the news reached Krishna in Dwaraka. He heard too, that the Kaurava army had been routed. But he came to Panchala with his army. He was in the court of Drupada when Vidura came there, also Balarama.

Tears flowed down the cheeks of Vidura when he saw the Pandavas. He was overcome with emotion. The value of a thing is never so poignantly precious as when we contemplate the loss of it. It was even so with Vidura. The thought that they had escaped from the dread fire in Varanavata made him realize how much they meant to him. He offered the costly gifts that had been sent by Dhritarashtra to Drupada, to the Pandavas and their bride. They spent some time together talking of a thousand things. Finally, he came to the subject in the minds of all of them, the king's message. Vidura addressed Drupada and said: "My brother Dhritarashtra asked me to remember him to all of you. Bheeshma and your friend Drona send you their affectionate greetings. The king considers himself very fortunate in having you as his relation. So do all the Kaurava princes and their elders. The king is desirous of seeing his sons, the Pandavas. So great is his relief at their escaping death at Varanavata that he wants to embrace them with affection".

Here, a smile of pure mischief lit up the face of Krishna. Bheema's face was a study. Arjuna was biting his lower lip with his teeth. And Yudhishthira was trying not to smile. As though he did not see all this, Vidura continued: "The king wants his daughter-in-law to come to Hastinapura and please the city which is all excitement at the thought of seeing the Pandavas with their bride. They are all delirious with joy on hearing about the good fortune that has befallen the Pandavas." That was the end of the king's message. Vidura then said: "If you will let them accompany me to Hastinapura, we will be honoured".

Drupada said: "I am also immensely pleased and honoured because of this our alliance with the noble House of the Kurus. As for their going to Hastinapura it is not proper for me to say anything about it. I leave it to Yudhishthira and his brothers to decide. Balarama and Krishna are also here. I will abide by their decision". Krishna said: "I think they ought to go to Hastinapura". Arjuna turned his startled eyes to the bland face of Krishna as he said this. But he said nothing. Drupada said that the Pandavas were free to go and please the king, since he seemed to be so kindly disposed towards them.

Vidura went to the apartments of Kunti. He fell at her feet. Tears from his eyes washed her feet. Kunti made him get up. She led him to a seat and comforted him. She said: "Your sons are now alive because of your wisdom and love. I think of you day and night. Your devotion to us is a thing which cannot be forgotten in a hurry. I do not know if it is safe to go to Hastinapura. My mind is upset: I cannot think for myself". Vidura said: "My dear sister, no evil can befall the sons of Kunti. Please do not be afraid. Very soon, you will see your sons as lords of the earth".

The Pandavas set out for Hastinapura. They were accompanied by Krishna. Soon they reached the capital city. The citizens were all eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Pandava princes. It was so long since they went away. The city was beautifully decorated. The streets were sprayed with perfumed water. There were flowers everywhere. The sons of Dhritarashtra who welcomed them were Vikarna and Chitrasena. Drona was there with Kripa. The palace was reached and the Pandavas fell at the feet of Bheeshma and Dhritarashtra. They were cordially received by everyone.

The princess of Kasi, who was the wife of Duryodhana, received the young bride. She was accompanied by the other daughters-in-law of the king. She prostrated before Kunti. Gandhari's palace was reached. Kunti, with Draupadi fell at the feet of Gandhari and asked her for her blessings. Gandhari, who had the power to see into the future, embraced Kunti and then, Draupadi. While she threw her arms about the soft form of Draupadi she told herself: "This woman is fated to be the death of my sons". She blessed them both and then gave orders for the house of Pandu to be prepared for their residence.

Chapter 39

KHANDAVAPRASTHA, THE GIFT OF THE KING

An official reception was arranged for the Pandavas in the great hall of the palace. There they went, accompanied by Krishna. Dhritarashtra, after the preliminaries, said: "Yudhishthira, listen to my words. This kingdom of mine owes its existence to your dear and illustrious father. You are entitled to rule this kingdom too. Therefore I suggest that the kingdom be divided between you and my son, Duryodhana. I have decided to make you lord of Khandavaprastha. I want to know

all your opinions and that of Krishna". Krishna smiled a scathing smile. Yudhishthira saw it and said nothing. He went to the seat where the king was sitting and he saluted him and said: "Whatever you say I will obey". Krishna still smiled and said nothing. There was a suggestion of a sneer on the lips of the wise Vidura also.

Dhritarashtra called Vidura to his side and said: "You must hurry with the preparations for the coronation. Let the city put on her best attire to celebrate this great event. I am extremely pleased with the course of events. I am now feeling as though a great load is off my mind. I will see the son of my brother the king of the land". Bheeshma, Drona and Kripa were pleased with the affectionate words of the king. Finally Krishna spoke. He said: "I can understand the king's eagerness to hurry with the coronation. It is but right that the preparations should be prompt. We are all eager to see Yudhishthira crowned as king". Vyaasa came at that moment. The entire hall stood up as one man and honoured him. He was there to preside over the function. The preparations were indeed lavish. It seemed as though the king was celebrating the coronation of his own son. He was so very warm and enthusiastic about the whole thing.

On the auspicious day suggested by Vyaasa, the coronation was duly celebrated. Kripa, Bheeshma, Drona, Dhaumya, Vyaasa and Krishna blessed Yudhishthira with the words: "May you conquer the entire world! May you perform the great Rajasuya and Asvamedha yagas! May you live long and rule the world as your forefathers did before you! May your fame spread to the four quarters like the perfume of the flower carried by the breeze!" There was nothing but joy in the heart of everyone. The exception was, of course, Duryodhana. The king knew the sorrow that was burning his son and had tried to find a way to pacify him. Duryodhana was his very life.

In the presence of all the courtiers and Krishna, he told Yudhishthira: "You are now lord of Khandavaprastha. It is but proper that you should go to your kingdom and begin your rule as early as possible. It was at Khandavaprastha that our ancestors Pururavas, Nahusha and Yayati ruled. It was the capital of the Kuru kingdom for a very long time. I hope you will have a happy life there". Yudhishthira received his commands with the humility that was part of him. He took leave of all the people in the palace and in the city and set out for his kingdom, Khandavaprastha, accompanied by Krishna.

The country called Khandavaprastha was once the capital of the Kurus. But it was later destroyed by the curse of the rishis. This was to punish the misdemeanour of the son of Budha. The capital had to be abandoned. It was now a barren waste. No one could live there. Nothing would grow. Not even animals could exist there. Such

a terrible waste of land was given to Yudhishthira as his share of the Kuru land. Literally, the king spoke the truth when he said that half the kingdom should be ruled by Yudhishthira. In extent Khandavaprastha was half of the kingdom. Yudhishthira knew the nature of the land over which he was crowned so pompously by his dear uncle. Krishna knew it well enough. But Yudhishthira was tired of the incessant quarrel with his cousins. He was peace-loving. If Duryodhana resented his presence at Hastinapura, Yudhishthira reciprocated his feelings. He could not think of living for ever in the court of Dhritarashtra. He wanted peace. He agreed to accept this injustice; not because he could not fight, but because he would not fight. He hated the thoughts of war. He had the mind of a sanyasin encased in the body of a kshatriya. His other name was Ajatasatru. The name fitted him. He did not want to be the enemy of anyone.

They reached Khandavaprastha. They all looked on the desolate country spread out in front of them. Krishna said: "Yudhishthira, look at the very beautiful country that has been given to you by your loving uncle. The person, who looks at lightning and thinks how beautiful it is, usually forgets the thunder that is sure to follow in its wake. The king is like that. To think that this injustice has been sanctioned by that old man Bheeshma shows that they are all to meet their fate. They will all, everyone of them, reap the fruits of their actions. But that is all in the future. Now, let us see what we can do to disappoint the blind king". Krishna summoned Indra. He said: "Indra, the Kuru monarch Dhritarashtra has been magnanimous enough to grant this piece of land to the Pandavas. It is now up to you to change the face of the country. It is called Khandavaprastha. But from now on, it will be called Indraprastha, since you will give new life to it. Please do the needful and beautify the place. Make it so wonderful and so fertile that its equal will be only your world, the Indraloka". Indra said: "Visvakarma, the divine architect, will take charge of this. It will become the most wonderful place in this entire world".

On an auspicious day, the reconstruction of the place was begun. Vyaasa was there to recite the holy incantations. Visvakarma's magic started to work. In a very short time he transformed the place. The city was ready for the Pandavas very soon. Yudhishthira entered the city in the midst of joyous shouting from the people. The fame of Indraprastha spread far and wide. People from distant countries came to see Indraprastha, and those who came did not return to their countries. The work on the city being completed, Visvakarma went away. Yudhishthira was very happy with his brothers and Krishna.

A few days were spent thus. Krishna approached Yudhishthira and said: "My lord, I have a request to make". Yudhishthira turned his

startled eyes on him. Krishna told him that he had to go back to Dwaraka since he had been away from there for a very long time. Yudhishthira was very unhappy. Krishna reassured him that he was always thinking of the Pandavas and their welfare. "I will come to you", said Krishna, "whenever you think of me. I will travel faster than thought. But now give me leave to go back". He took leave of all of them and proceeded towards Dwaraka. His chariot was going forward. But he had left his heart in the keeping of these men who were like gods on earth.

Chapter 40

ARJUNA'S TEERTHAYATRA

The Pandavas were very happy in Indraprastha. A few days after Krishna had gone away, the sage Narada came, by chance, to see them. Yudhishthira received him with all the honour that was due to him. Narada was one of the sons of Brahma, the creator. He was a great man. He was a devotee of Narayana. When they were all seated. Narada asked Yudhishthira how he was ruling the kingdom. He gave him valuable advice on many things. Yudhishthira sent for their queen Draupadi. She came and prostrated before the Sage. After receiving his blessings, she went back to her apartments. Narada said: "This Draupadi is the wife of all five of you. You must be careful that there is no dissension amongst yourselves because of her. There were two brothers, by name Sunda and Upasunda, who were inseparable. They met a beautiful Apsara by name Tilottama. Both of them fell in love with her. In their rivalry they destroyed each other. I am telling you this story so that you may not let anything come between you and your brothers. You are powerful as long as you are united. But once your team is broken, the sons of Dhritarashtra will find it easy to defeat you". Before he went away, the Pandavas came to a decision. Draupadi had to spend one year in the house of each of the five brothers. If, when she was alone with one of them, any other brother should intrude on their privacy, he must go away to the forest and stay away for a year. They were happy now that they had no chance of quarrelling with each other.

One day a brahmin came to Arjuna. His cows had been stolen by a thief. The brahmin was frantic with the loss of his beloved cows. He asked Arjuna to recover them for him. It was not a hard thing to

do, and Arjuna agreed at once. He rushed towards the place where their weapons were kept. He then suddenly remembered that it was the house of Yudhishthira. The time was inopportune since Yudhishthira and Draupadi were there by themselves. Arjuna did not know what to do. He told the brahmin that it was not possible for him to get his bow just then. He said: "Please do not be worried. I will get your cows for you. You can be sure of it. But not immediately. I must wait for my brother to give me permission to get my bow and arrows". But the brahmin would not listen. Arjuna tried in vain to pacify him. Finally Arjuna had to fall in with his wishes. He decided to go and get his weapons. He did so. He followed the thieves. They had not gone very far. Their tracks were still fresh. Arjuna followed them, rescued the cows effortlessly and gave them back to the brahmin. He went away blessing Arjuna and praising his valour.

Arjuna went to his brother and asked him for permission to go on a pilgrimage to all the sacred rivers. Yudhishthira was distressed. He said: "Arjuna, I do not think it is necessary. It was an emergency. It is not as though you deliberately came and disturbed us. You had to enter. Please desist from this course of action. I do not blame you and I am not offended. You did no wrong". But Arjuna was adamant. He said: "My lord, it is not right to find excuses to prevent my going on pilgrimage. We had imposed upon ourselves certain conditions. I must go according to that. Being a person who has always been righteous, you must not let your affection for me sway your judgment. Please grant me permission to go". With great unwillingness, Yudhishthira allowed Arjuna to go on this voluntary exile for a year.

Arjuna had a pleasant journey. He reached the banks of the river Ganga. He went into the river to have a bath. When he was about to get out of the waters, he was captured by a very beautiful maiden. She took him to her palace under the water. Arjuna was astonished. He asked her the reason for her strange conduct. Looking at him who stood looking at her with a smile in his eyes, she was overcome with shyness, and said: "I am the daughter of the king of Nagaloka. My name is Ulupi. I saw you when you were in the waters of the river. I have fallen in love with you. You must accept my love". Arjuna told her who he was and how he was on an exile for a year. He added: "Now that you know everything, you must let me go. I have to observe brahmacharya. You must see how impossible it is for me to please you, much as I would like to". He stood looking at her with a smile on his eyes. She said: "I see what you mean. You have not, however, understood the conditions of your exile. You do not understand the position at all. Your brahmacharya stands as far as Draupadi is concerned. It does not apply to any other woman whom you are

pleased to take". She bent her head in shyness. Arjuna was pleased with her and her beauty. He spent a happy night with her. The next day he returned to the earth. He related his adventure to the rishis on the banks of the Ganga and resumed his journey.

Arjuna proceeded towards the Himalaya mountains. After visiting all the sacred rivers there and in its neighbourhood, he turned southwards. He bathed in the rivers Godavari and Kaveri. He then reached a place called Manalur. The king of the place was called Chitrasena. He had a daughter, Chitrangadaa. Arjuna fell in love with her. He went to the king and asked him for her hand. The king replied: "In our family, for the last so many generations, there has been an only child. This my daughter is an only child. She is all I have. I have brought her up with all love and care. Her child will be heir to my throne. If you are willing to leave the child to me as my heir and not claim it, I will be very happy to give my daughter to the greatest hero in the world". Arjuna agreed to the condition. He married Chitrangadaa. He spent three months with her. He then left her and went further south. He saw the sea at the southernmost end of Bharatavarsha. He turned north and turned homewards. He travelled along the west coast. He bathed in the sea which hugs Bharatavarsha on the western side. He was nearing the end of his journey.

Chapter 41

SUBHADRA'S GARDENS

When the sons of the Vrishni House were learning archery from Drona at Hastinapura, Arjuna's good friend had been Gada, the cousin of Krishna. Gada had told Arjuna about his cousin Subhadra. She was the sister of Sarana. Arjuna had heard so much about her beauty that he had fallen in love with her without having even seen her. He now remembered her. Arjuna considered ways and means of seeing her without being seen. He did not want to be recognized by anyone. He knew that Subhadra was in Dwaraka. Arjuna went to Prabhasa-teertha, a place very near Dwaraka. He had disguised himself as a yati. With a trident in his hand and with holy ashes covering his entire body, with garlands of rudraksha on his neck and in his matted hair, Arjuna walked about the streets of Prabhasa. During the night he sat under the shade of a spreading banyan tree and gave the appearance of being in deep thought and meditation. The thought of Krishna was uppermost in his mind. He wished that he would come to him for

help. Suddenly it began to rain. It was pouring down in torrents and Arjuna was still sitting under the banyan tree.

Krishna had already heard about the arrival of a sadhu at Prabhasa. From the description, he guessed that it must be Arjuna. It did not take him very long to guess the secret in the heart of his dearest friend. That night he was spending with his favourite wife Satyabhama. All on a sudden, he began to laugh loudly till tears ran down his cheeks. Satyabhama wanted to know why he laughed. He continued laughing without saying anything. Finally, after some time, Krishna wiped his eyes and said: "My cousin Arjuna had left his city Indraprastha a few months back: he had been on a teerthayatra. The yatra is almost over. Only four months are left. Now, with his heart filled with the image of my sister Subhadra, he has come to Prabhasa. He has come in the guise of a yati. It is the thought of him sitting under the shade of a big banyan tree while this rain is pouring down in torrents, that made me laugh so much now. I think it is but right that I should go to him now and welcome him to Dwaraka".

Krishna went in the pouring rain towards the banyan tree under which poor Arjuna was sitting. The meeting of the friends was very tender. Krishna asked him all about his wanderings. Arjuna related everything to him. Krishna smiled slyly and said: "So these wanderings have had such a sobering effect on the great Pandava that he has renounced the world and taken to Kashaya!" Arjuna said: "My lord, you know how it is with me. You know the innermost thoughts in my heart. You know why I have put on this attire. You must help me to win the fair Subhadra". Krishna assured him that nothing would please him more than to see his dear sister as the wife of his dearest friend. He took him to the hill called Raivataka and asked him to spend some time there. Krishna returned to Dwaraka.

A few days elapsed. There was a feast on the top of the hill. The Vrishnis went to the hill to spend some time there. Arjuna was there without being seen by anyone. He watched them all passing by. He knew them all. Suddenly his eyes were arrested by the beauty of a woman who passed by. She was surrounded by several maids. Arjuna looked at her and his eyes expressed all the feelings in his heart. He heard someone by his side. Krishna had managed to escape from the crowd and he came to Arjuna. He said: "My friend, your expression does not become the attire you are now sporting". Arjuna said: "Please, Krishna, please do not tease me. Who is she? Who is that beautiful woman who passed by just now?" Krishna replied: "She is Subhadra, the sister of Sarana. She is my half-sister. If you are interested in her I can tell my father about it". Arjuna was extremely happy to know that the woman he had been loving without having seen her was

as beautiful as she was reputed to be. He said: "My lord, I leave it to you to find a way out of this problem of mine. I love your sister. Tell me how I can make her mine. I must marry this girl. You must make it possible". Krishna laughed at him. He said: "My dear Arjuna, you know that marriages are of many kinds. But the most wonderful of all these is the marriage of two people in love. If you can make my sister fall in love with you, then you can carry her away to Indraprastha and marry her. This is the method most common among kshatriyas. As for the method, you must now go and sit in the temple courtyard. It will look better if you are absorbed in meditation; which will not be hard since you have something pleasant on which you can meditate! The rest will follow. Remember, Arjuna, you must not lose your nerve!"

Arjuna did as he was told. Krishna went away and lost himself in the crowd of the Vrishni heroes. The worship in the temple was over. Subhadra and her maids had gone away. Balarama, Kritavarma, Samba, Sarana, Pradyumna and Gada, attended by others, went round the temple. They saw the yati sitting under the tree in the courtyard. He was deeply absorbed in meditation. His eyes were closed and Balarama was greatly impressed by the personality of this young yati who looked so pure and unearthly with his handsome face and body covered with holy ashes. His eyes were closed and that lent a mystery to his entire pose. Actually Arjuna was highly nervous. He was afraid that they would see through his disguise in a moment. But they did not. Arjuna had been told not to lose his nerve. Very cautiously he opened his eyes and found Balarama standing before him with his palms clasped together in an attitude of worship. The miracle had happened! He was not found out! Balarama prostrated before the yati. He welcomed him to Dwaraka and said: "May we know the plans of your holiness? Where have you come from? What can we do to make you comfortable?" Arjuna sighed a deep sigh of relief and said: "I have been all over the world. I have seen many places. I have never spent more than three nights in any place. But now the rainy season has come in full force. The sky is dark with the dense black rain clouds. I must spend these four months somewhere. I thought that this picturesque Raivataka hill is comforting to me. In its silence I am able to concentrate on my meditation". Balarama was greatly impressed by this young yati who spoke so beautifully. He was determined to play host to him. He seemed young in age but old in wisdom. It was lucky that his Dwaraka should have had the good fortune to have been chosen by the yati for his four months' stay.

Krishna came to the spot just then. Balarama made him worship the great yati. Hiding a smile of mischief, Krishna fell at his feet and

received the holy ashes with becoming humility. Balarama told him all about the yati, how he had travelled all over the world and how he had honoured their Raivataka hill by his presence with the intention of spending the rainy season there. He asked Krishna to suggest a proper place for the yati to stay. Krishna said: "When you are here, you, my elder, it will not be right on my part to talk. It will be impertinent". Balarama was pleased with his humility. He said: "I feel that the best place will be the gardens about the apartments of Subhadra. I will make her attend to all the wants of this great man". It was the custom for young girls to attend on great men. The blessings of rishis and holy men were said to insure a happy life and future for the young girls. According to that custom Balarama suggested that Subhadra should attend to the wants of the yati. Krishna wanted just this to happen, and it had happened. But his appearance belied his happiness. Krishna looked hesitant. He said: "I do not think it is advisable to let him stay in such close proximity with our Subhadra. We know nothing about this man. This yati, brother, seems to be young. He is handsome. He has a very beautiful body, too beautiful to have been under severe austerities for long. He seems to have an eloquent tongue. Each of these things is very attractive to a young impressionable girl. This man seems to be endowed with all the qualities that are sure to attract and charm a young girl like our Subhadra. I do not advise it. In fact, I strongly disapprove of this your suggestion. But of course you are wise and far-seeing. You must have considered all this before coming to this decision". Balarama was furious with Krishna for talking about the yati in such disparaging terms. He said: "You seem to be ignorant of the greatness of this yati. He has travelled all over the world. He is a brahmacharin with all his senses under control. It is right and proper for you to beg his pardon for saying such wrong things about him".

Krishna was asked to take the yati to the apartments of Subhadra. He had to make all arrangements for the stay of the yati to be comfortable. Krishna was very pleased at the way things were shaping, and took Arjuna to the palace gardens. He took Arjuna by hand and took him to Rukmini and Satyabhama. He told them who he really was. They welcomed him with smiles and said: "We have been hearing about you from all the Vrishnis and from our Krishna. We have been wanting to meet you since ever so long". Krishna then took Arjuna to Subhadra. He told her about the instructions of Balarama, and he left Arjuna in the care of Subhadra. With a parting smile of teasing amusement, Krishna went away from there.

CHAPTER 42

SUBHADRAARJUNA

Arjuna spent several happy days in the gardens of Subhadra. She was following her brother's commands religiously. Arjuna's love for her increased day by day. She would sit by his side and attend to all his wants. She would bring him his food and feed him herself. All the time Arjuna would sigh and look at her. She could not understand why he looked so unhappy. She would go away. She would be playing in the garden with her friends. Arjuna would keep looking at her as Agni, the god of fire, would look at Swaha. Thus time passed, happily and unhappily, for Arjuna.

In the city of Dwaraka, and in the House of the Vrishnis, the name of Arjuna was a household word. He stood for all that was brave and beautiful. In the school of archery, the common talk would be: "You must become like Arjuna". When little boys quarrelled, the talk would be: "Do not dare to defy me or challenge me. Even Arjuna is not my equal! Who are you then?" When elders blessed the young boys, they would say: "May you become as great a warrior as Arjuna". When a woman was to become a mother, the blessing would be: "May you be the mother of a son like Arjuna". Living in an atmosphere steeped in the Arjuna lore, Subhadra had already become more than interested in this hero. Her brother Krishna would always speak to her about Arjuna and his lovable qualities and his personal beauty. Gada had told her so much about Arjuna. She too, like Arjuna, had fallen in love with him whom she had not seen. Rukmini, the wife of Krishna, had fallen in love with Krishna without having seen him. Subhadra was like her now. She was always eager for news about Arjuna. Whenever anyone came from the direction of Indraprastha, she would ask him to tell her about Arjuna.

Days passed by pleasantly for Arjuna. Subhadra was intrigued by the behaviour of the yati. She could feel his eyes on her all the time. He would look at her with such hot eyes that she would run away unable to meet his eyes. Slowly a thought began to form in her mind. This yati *did* resemble her Arjuna. The description of Arjuna which she had heard fitted this man. His arms and chest looked like those of Arjuna. One day she saw his shoulders. Both of them were scarred. She had heard that Arjuna could use both his hands when he handled the bow and arrows. A suspicion was forming in her mind. "Perhaps, he is Arjuna", she thought. But then reason would assert

itself. How could this yati be Arjuna? Arjuna was not a sanyasin. She decided to talk to him about it.

One day Subhadra asked him: "They say that you have travelled all over Bharatavarsha. Tell me about the beautiful spots you have visited". Arjuna was only too glad to do so. This became a daily routine. She would spend hours together in his company listening to his charming voice. He was eloquent, as Krishna had warned Balarama. Once, when they were together, Subhadra led the talk to Indraprastha. She said: "In your wanderings you must have been to Indraprastha. That is where my aunt Kunti Devi lives. You must have seen Yudhishthira, our cousin. The Pandavas are our cousins, you know". The yati said that he had met them and that he knew them very well. Subhadra said: "I hear that Arjuna has been away from Indraprastha. He too, like you, must be wandering all over the world visiting holy places. Have you, by any chance, met him during your wanderings?" Arjuna thought that the time was opportune. He smiled at her and said: "Oh yes. I have met him. In fact, I know where he is, at the present moment". "Where?" asked Subhadra who was excited to hear that he knew about Arjuna. Arjuna said: "I will tell you". He addressed her in a very gentle and caressing tone. He said: "Arjuna has fallen in love with the most beautiful woman in this world. To get her, he is wearing the garb of a yati. He is always here, before you. How is it, you have not recognized me so far?" Subhadra's face became red. She looked down, not daring to meet his eyes. He told her about his love for her. He spoke pleadingly and told her that he could not live without her. She listened without speaking a word, and then went away to her chamber.

Subhadra became sick, sick with love for Arjuna. Krishna knew how things were now. He felt that it would be wiser if the two young people did not meet for some time. He sent Rukmini to attend to the wants of the yati. When she saw the disappointment on the face of Arjuna, she could not contain herself. "I am sorry you are not pleased with my coming", said Rukmini with a mischievous smile. Arjuna looked sheepish. She told him about Subhadra; that she was unwell and that the cause was beyond the intelligence of all the physicians.

Subhadra's illness was the cause of worry to Devaki and all the others. Devaki went to Balarama and Krishna and told them about it. Krishna suggested that they should all go to the island nearby and worship lord Rudra for a fortnight. He would set the matter right. The credulous Balarama thought that it was a good plan. They all left Subhadra alone, and went to the island to perform the puja. Krishna managed to spend a few moments alone with his dear sister. He said: "Listen to me carefully, Subhadra. We are all going out for a fort-

night. You will be here. I am going to talk to the yati now. Twelve days from today is an auspicious day. I think it will be the auspicious day for your wedding". He went away with the others.

Twelve days later, Arjuna spoke to Subhadra. He said: "Your brother Krishna must have told you already that today is the day of all days when I will realize my heart's dearest wish. You know how much I love you. I have spent sleepless nights thinking of you and of this happy moment. We are kshatriyas. We are allowed the gandharva form of marriage. You must agree to this". Subhadra was silent. Tears coursed down her cheeks. Arjuna comforted her. He said: "Do not be afraid or upset. I will carry you away to Indraprastha". He asked her to get a chariot ready yoked with swift horses to carry them away. The chariot had to be equipped with all weapons. She did as she was told. The chariot was that of Krishna. He had left it behind for the sole purpose of helping Arjuna. It was fitted with the favourite horses of Krishna: Saibya, Sugriva, Valaahaka and Meghapushpa. Subhadra came and told Arjuna that everything was ready.

Arjuna knew already that Subhadra was very efficient in the art of driving a chariot. He asked her to take the reins. Discarding the dress of the yati and donning his usual princely robes, Arjuna ascended the chariot. He looked his old self now. The lovers were ready to go. With a crack of the whip, Subhadra started the horses. The chariot got well on its way.

Chapter 43

ARJUNA'S RETURN TO INDRAPRASTHA

The watchmen of Dwaraka city saw Subhadra being carried away by some kshatriya. They tried to stop the progress of the chariot. But they could not. The two had gone beyond the outskirts of the city. The miscreant was recognized by some as Arjuna. The warning signal was given. It announced to the Vrishnis that danger was threatening Dwaraka. Hearing this, they all returned to the city, led by Balarama. They were told that Subhadra had been carried away by someone who looked like Arjuna. Balarama was furious. He looked at Krishna who stood silent. He said: "You are silent. This must be your doing. Why did you allow this to happen?" "I allow this to happen?" said Krishna with startled eyes. "In fact, it was I who warned you about this possibility. Perhaps you do not remember. Even at the begin-

ning I spoke to you about the danger of bringing these two people together. Both are young and both are beautiful. I knew that something like this would happen. But you would not listen to a word against this yati. Now look what has happened. If I may say so, it is all your doing, my lord". Balarama said: "Krishna, I know you through and through. You must have had a hand in this. Even now it is not too late. We will all go in pursuit of Arjuna. I will destroy him and also the entire Indraprastha city. I will destroy all the Pandavas". With his eyes spitting anger, the great Balarama looked like the God of Death.

Krishna went near him. He tried to pacify him. He spoke in his soft, gentle, persuasive voice, as though he were talking to a child. He said: "Do not be so angry, brother. If you do make up your mind to destroy the Pandavas, nothing can save them. They will be like wisps of cotton caught in a gale. It is not right that you should be so angry. Let us now consider what has happened. Our Subhadra accompanied Arjuna willingly enough. It is obvious from the fact that she equipped my chariot and drove it herself. Surely she has chosen Arjuna as her lord. After all, my dear brother, it is Arjuna and no one else. What better husband can we get for our sister? This is no insult to our family. He is our dear cousin. He belongs to the great Kuru House. As for his prowess, he is unequalled by anyone. Born of a good mother and the lord of the heavens he is the brightest star in the galaxy of the Kuru clan. He is indeed a worthy person to marry our sister. Let us make peace with him. Let us not be angry. It is no shame to desist from fighting. It is very commendable. Let us follow him and show him that we are not angry with him".

Balarama was convinced by the arguments of Krishna. They then set out in pursuit of Arjuna. But he had gone too far. They had to return to Dwaraka. They decided to wait till Arjuna reached Indraprastha. They would go there later and marry Arjuna and Subhadra according to religious rites. They made preparations to go to Indraprastha.

Arjuna, in the meantime, was nearing the gates of the city. He thought of Draupadi and her anger when she knew that he had had this romantic adventure in Dwaraka. He told Subhadra: "Draupadi is a very temperamental woman. If she hears that you are my wife, she will be very angry with you and with me. You must win her affection first. If she knows later that you are my wife it will not matter. So, you must dress up in the style common to milkmaids. You look divine in that dress. Go to the apartments of Draupadi. Tell her that you are Subhadra, the sister of Krishna. She will be charmed by you and your appearance. I will come there later". They reached the city.

Looking beautiful in her rustic dress, Subhadra went to Draupadi and announced herself as Subhadra the sister of Krishna. She was received with open arms. Draupadi blessed her with sweet words: "May you become the bride of a hero. May you be the mother of a hero". The two women talked for hours about Krishna and Dwaraka. Time passed pleasantly for both of them. There was sudden commotion in the streets of the city. Everyone was saying: "Arjuna has come back!" Arjuna reached the palace. He fell at the feet of his brothers Yudhishthira and Bheema. Nakula and Sahadeva received his warm embrace. He told them all about his wanderings and about his love affair at Dwaraka: about his marriage with Subhadra, the sister of Balarama and Krishna. He then went to Draupadi. She smiled archly at him and said: "Do not worry. I have already met the milkmaid. She is very beautiful". She took the coy Subhadra in her arms and said: "Who can resist you and your beauty? You have won my heart already, within a few moments. What chances could poor Arjuna have had against your charms?"

A few days later the Vrishnis arrived in Indraprastha with costly gifts and precious gems and a thousand beautiful things as their dowry for Subhadra. They came to celebrate the wedding of Arjuna and Subhadra. They all stayed in Indraprastha for a few days after the wedding. A few days later, Balarama, with all his attendants and the other Vrishnis, returned to Dwaraka. Krishna, however, did not return with them. He stayed on in Indraprastha with the Pandavas.

CHAPTER 44

THE HUNGRY BRAHMIN

It was now summer. The heat was unbearable. One day, in the morning before the sun had appeared, Arjuna went to Krishna and said: "Krishna, the heat is unbearable. Let us go to the banks of the river Yamuna. It is so near. Let us spend the day there and return home in the evening." Krishna welcomed the suggestion with enthusiasm. They got Yudhishthira's permission and they all set out for the banks of the river where there was a great forest. It was called Khandava. It was said that the rays of the sun could not penetrate into the place, so dense was the growth of the trees. It was inhabited by wild animals. It was the home of the serpent king Takshaka. There was something

terrifying about the appearance of the forest. It had a strange fascination for the two friends.

They camped on the banks of the river. It was cool and very pleasant to stroll along the banks of the Yamuna. Krishna had a special affection for this river. It was the river which was part of his boyhood days. He remembered the home of Nanda, the king of the cowherds. He thought of his mother in Gokula, Yasoda, and her love for him. He thought of Radha and the place where they were wont to meet. It was a bower covered by jasmine creepers. Even now the perfume was borne to him by the wandering breeze. Krishna sighed. He told Arjuna about the many incidents of those days. He wondered what Radha was doing now. He remembered with pain the day when Akrura came to Gokula to take him and his brother Balarama to Mathura. The memory of the agony with which he bade good-bye to his beloved was still fresh in his mind. Years had passed. He now had Rukmini and Satyabhama. They were dear to him. But Radha was the one woman who had captured his entire heart. It was all years ago. But time had not dulled the edge of pain. Krishna's love for Radha was the same as it then had been. Radha was the northern star round which his thoughts wheeled their course as the mandala of the seven rishis did round Dhruva. She was constant as the northern star in her love for him. He would never meet her, he knew. He would meet her in the world beyond. But that was not to be in the near future. So many things had to happen in the world before he could go to Radha. It was like the longing of the soul for God, this anguished yearning for Radha, for the touch of her hand on his fevered brow. With a sigh, Krishna shook off these thoughts of the long ago which tugged at his heart strings.

The sun had reached the high heavens. It was almost noon. They had all finished their repast. The rest of the party was in the tents; Draupadi, Subhadra and Satyabhama. Krishna and Arjuna went along the banks of the river once again. It held them in thrall, that forest. It could be seen very clearly now. They sat on a tree trunk in a grove on the fringe of the forest. When they were just seated comfortably, there came to their presence a brahmin. His form was glowing like molten gold. His beard was red. His eyes were red. He himself was red like the sun just risen. Krishna and Arjuna got up and honoured the brahmin. He said: "I am hungry, very hungry. You must, both of you, satisfy my hunger". They said: "If you will tell us what you want we will certainly arrange to have it prepared for you. What kind of food do you favour?" The brahmin smiled and said: "Ordinary food cannot satisfy me. I am Agni. For a long time I have been waiting for your coming. I have been told about you. I know that

you are the only two people who will make me realize my dream. I have been trying again and again to swallow this huge, big Khandava forest. But I have not been able to do it. Lord Indra has a friend called Takshaka. He is the serpent king. This forest is the home of Takshaka. So, whenever I try to burn it, this Indra sends down a heavy shower of rain and I am unable to do anything about it. You are both proficient in archery and you are familiar with the divine astras. If you undertake to ward off the rain by means of your arrows, I can burn to my heart's content. I beg this boon of you both".

Krishna and Arjuna were amazed at this unusual request. They welcomed this adventure. Arjuna said: "You are right about one thing. I have divine astras and so has Krishna. We can easily ward off the rain sent by Indra. But I have no bow powerful enough to stand the astras. I need a strong bow and it should be endowed with superhuman qualities to make our task easy. I also need a quiver from which arrows will flow endlessly. My chariot too is not quick enough or powerful enough for the task ahead of us. The horses must be the fleetest in the world if I have to succeed in this defence of the forest against the king of the heavens. I assure you I can help you if only you can furnish me with the things I have now mentioned. As for Krishna, he is more powerful than all the weapons of the heavens put together".

Agni appreciated his arguments. He summoned Varuna, the lord of the oceans. He said: "Varuna, you have with you a divine bow given to you by Soma; also two quivers which can never become empty. Please give them to Arjuna. Please give him a chariot with fast horses. Today Arjuna is going to perform a great deed with the help of Krishna. Please give these things to Arjuna". "I have given them already", said Varuna. He went and brought a beautiful bow for Arjuna. It was famed throughout the world and the other worlds by the name Gandiva. It was gifted with rare powers. No warrior who owned it could meet with defeat. It was very beautiful. Varuna brought two quivers of arrows. The streams of arrows from these quivers would be endless. A chariot was brought. The flag was the emblem of a monkey. Four horses were yoked to the chariot. They were white. They flew faster than wind or the mind even. This was the chariot which helped the Devas to win the war against the Asuras. It glowed like a new cloud lit up by the sun. The noise made by the chariot thrilled Arjuna's heart.

Arjuna was overcome with gratitude and happiness. He was humble before the gods who had favoured him. He made a pradakshina of the chariot. He took up the great Gandiva in his hand after saluting it. He strapped the two quivers to his shoulders. He prostrated be-

fore Agni and then he strung the bow. The twang of the string was terrible. It thrilled Arjuna as nothing else had so far. Agni gave the Chakra to Krishna. He said: "With this chakra you can defeat anyone. No deva will be able to defy you. The name of this chakra is Sudarsana. This is, in fact, yours. In days of yore this was the weapon with which you vanquished the Daityas. It is returning to you after a long time". Varuna then gave a mace by name Kaumodaki to Krishna. Arjuna and Krishna were immensely pleased with their acquisitions. Arjuna ascended the chariot. They spoke to Agni: "Fully equipped as we are, with all the weapons that we needed, we can face anyone. Why should you be scared of Indra now?" Agni, pleased beyond measure, assumed the form of flames and began the destruction of the great Khandava forest. Flames enveloped the forest on all sides.

Chapter 45

THE BURNING OF THE KHANDAVA FOREST

The noise of the burning could be heard to a great distance. The two defenders, Arjuna and Krishna, went round the forest taking care not to let any living thing escape from the burning flames. There was absolutely no chance of escape with these two, like messengers of death, keeping jealous watch over the forest. There were birds which tried to rise up out of reach of the flames. The arrows of Arjuna hit them and they dropped back into the leaping flames. The fire had now reached a stage when it would not be possible to quench it. There was great commotion in the heavens. News reached Indra that the Khandava forest was being devoured by Agni. The gods went to him in a deputation and asked him to stop it. Indra could not believe that Agni had courage enough to defy him and his rain clouds. He wanted to see how it had happened.

From the high heavens Indra saw his son Arjuna and Krishna bent on helping Agni to destroy the forest. He decided to defend the forest from this onslaught. The sky was now dark with the rain clouds which collected fast. The rains came. It was no ordinary downpour. If the fire resembled the burning up of the entire world at the end of time, the rains looked like the great deluge at the end of time. Each, in itself, could destroy the world. But they were now aimed at each other. The world, perhaps, would be saved. Such was the intensity

of both the forces of nature. The rains came down in torrents. The heat was so great that before the water reached the earth it was dried up into steam. Indra was furious. He summoned his favourite clouds, Pushkala and Avartaka. The rain was now quite different. It looked like huge columns of water descending on the earth. Arjuna was not worried. He built a blanket of arrows enveloping the forest on all sides. Not a drop of water could reach the forest.

At the time of the burning Takshaka, the serpent king, was away from the Khandava forest. His son Asvasena was caught up in the fire. He and his mother tried to get out of the forest. But Arjuna would not let them. The mother said: "My son, you must try and escape. I will distract the attention of Arjuna and you must escape then". The son had to obey the mother. She rose up in the sky and, seeing her, Arjuna killed her with three sharp arrows. Indra saw the state of affairs. He overpowered Arjuna with a sudden deluge of water and allowed the snake prince to escape. Furious at the deceit practised upon him, Arjuna assaulted Indra. Indra sent all the divine astras he had. He sent the Vayavyastra. A terrible wind blew, trying to put out the fire. Arjuna knew how to counteract this astra. The two defenders Krishna and Arjuna were very angry with Indra. The fight was terrible. Indra now took up his Vajra to hurl it at these mortals who had dared to defy him. Looking at the anger of Indra, all the other gods took up their weapons to help him. Yama with his mace, Kubera with his reputed club, Varuna with his noose, Rudra with his trident, were all there intent on destroying the two human beings who had the audacity to fight with the king of the heavens. The rishis who had assembled there watched the fight with amazement. Indra was immensely pleased with his son. The fight went on; so did the burning of the forest. Neither showed signs of abating in fury.

A voice from the heavens spoke: "Indra, you must desist from your attempts to stop this fire. Your friend Takshaka is not in the forest. You have also helped his son to escape. It is not possible for you to defeat these two men. They are Nara and Narayana. They are invincible. It will be better if you stop this unnatural war with your son". Indra gave up fighting. He came to Krishna and Arjuna and said: "Together, you have today achieved a feat impossible even for the gods. You can ask any boon of me. I am pleased with you". Krishna shook his head gently and stood aside smiling. Arjuna was excited at the sight of his father. He fell at his feet and said: "Please give me all the divine astras you have". Indra said: "Surely I will give them to you. But the time is not ripe enough. When the Lord of lords, Sankara, gives you his Pasupata, then I will give you my astras". Indra went back to his heavenly abode.

There was an asura called Maya. He was caught in the flames. He was trying to get out of the fire. Krishna saw him and raised his chakra to destroy him. Maya, frantic with despair, rushed to Arjuna and fell at his feet. He begged him for mercy and pity. Arjuna said: "Do not be afraid. You will not be harmed". Krishna allowed him to live since Arjuna had granted him life. The fire raged on for hours. The entire forest was burnt to ashes. Agni went to the two friends and said: "I am now satisfied. With your help I have been able to realize my dream of the last so many years. I have been able to do the impossible with your help". He blessed them and disappeared from their sight.

Krishna and Arjuna walked towards the coolness of the river Yamuna. It was very welcome. The cool breeze comforted their tired limbs. The episode of the Khandava seemed like a dream now; so refreshing was the breeze blowing from the waters of the river. The river comforted them like the caress of a mother. They were there for a while. Krishna and Arjuna got up from the tree trunk on which they were sitting. They thought of returning to the camp and from there to Indraprastha. It was time to go and make preparations for the return. The sun had reached the western hill. The evening clouds were lit up like lamps at a feast. Soon the tropical night would suddenly descend on them like a cloak. They had to hurry.

SABHA PARVA

CHAPTER 1

MAYA BUILDS A HALL

Krishna and Arjuna had left the tree trunk and were walking towards the camp. Suddenly they heard the voice of Maya. He fell at their feet. He said: "I have been granted my life by you. I am Maya, the architect of the Asuras. I want to show my gratitude in some way. I want to do something for you in return for my life". Arjuna smiled at him and said: "I am happy I did this for you. I do not want any benefit from you.. It is my principle not to get anything in return for any good deed of mine." He was about to go away. Again he said: "You are not under any obligation to me. We are now good friends. I am satisfied with that". He turned to go. But Maya was adamant. He said: "It is but fitting that you should talk like this. I do not want to do anything in return for your kindness. I want to do something to show my gratitude". Arjuna was still unwilling to accept something from him. But he saw that Maya was sincere. Arjuna thought for a while and said: "I will not accept anything for myself. But, at the same time, I want to please you. Do something that will please Krishna. That will at once please me". Maya looked eagerly at Krishna and waited for him to speak.

Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu, had been born on the earth for the purpose of establishing Dharma. Krishna knew that the time had come when the world had to be shaken out of its complacency. He was Narayana, and Arjuna was Nara. They had been born on the earth for a purpose. Mother earth had complained to him that she could not bear the burden of sin any longer. He had assured her that He would come to her help. In his mind's eye Krishna saw the future of the world. He saw the field of Kurukshetra strewn with the bodies of the kings of the world. He remembered his promise to his dear attendants Jaya and Vijaya. They had been born on the earth as Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu. He had killed them. They had been born as Ravana and Kumbhakarna. He had killed them. They were now in their third and final life on the earth as Sisupala and Dantavaktra. He had to grant them release from this human bondage. Krishna thought of all these things and decided to begin the act of destruction.

Krishna appeared to ponder for a while. He said: "You say that you are a great architect. Yudhishthira is dear to me. I will be pleased if you build a palace for him. The sabha must be unique. You can do this for Yudhishthira. It will please me and Arjuna too if you do this".

Maya was very happy at the thought that he could do something for them. He planned in his mind's eye the sabha that was to be built for Yudhishthira.

They reached Indraprastha. They related the exciting events of the day to Yudhishthira. They presented Maya to him and told him about the sabha that he wanted to build for him. Yudhishthira welcomed him to the city and honoured him. Maya was very pleased with himself. He discussed the plan of the sabha with the Pandavas and Krishna. On an auspicious day, Maya began the construction of the great palace known in aftertimes as Mayasabha.

Krishna approached Yudhishthira with the request that he should be allowed to go back to Dwaraka. Many days had gone by since he had come there to Indraprastha. They were all unwilling to let him go. Yudhishthira said: "My lord, you are the star that guides our life's boat to safety. You have given us everything. How can we agree to your going away from us? You mean our very life to us. You are everything. You rule our thoughts and actions. You must be with us always to lead us in the right path. We will be lost without you". Krishna reassured Yudhishthira that he would always be there with them. He would come to them whenever they called for him. He took leave of all of them one by one, his aunt Kunti, the brothers, Draupadi and Subhadra. The chariot driven by Daruka was at the gates of the palace. Krishna looked at Subhadra with a mischievous smile and said: "I suppose I can take my chariot now! It has served its purpose and you do not need it any more!" With these parting words, Krishna ascended the chariot. Subhadra was still blushing. Yudhishthira asked Daruka to descend from the chariot. He got into the seat of the charioteer. Yudhishthira took the reins in his hands and, as was his custom, drove the chariot for a while. This had been his custom whenever Krishna went away from them. Arjuna and Bheema stood on either side of Krishna with the chamaras in their hands. Nakula and Sahadeva held the umbrella over his head. These were all gestures on the part of the Pandavas to honour one who was dearer to them than their very lives. Krishna received these services with great affection. The chariot proceeded for a distance. When the outskirts of the city were reached, the Pandavas descended from the chariot. Krishna took affectionate farewell of the brothers and turned in the direction of Dwaraka. The brothers stood with eyes following the course of the chariot till they could see it no more. Their minds, however, followed him to his city. They returned to Indraprastha with their minds full of Krishna.

Maya was busy with the preparations for the building of the Sabha. He approached Arjuna and said: "Near the great mountain Kailasa and

Mainaka there is a lake called Bindusaras. In that lake I have buried vessels filled with many precious gems. I want to use them for the sabha which I am going to build now. I will go there and fetch them. I have a gada which will be liked by Bheema. There is a conch called Devadatta which will be liked by you". Maya took leave of Arjuna and went to the mountain Kailasa. Bindusaras was the sacred spot where the river Ganga was released from the matted locks of Lord Sankara. She had to flow drop by drop, thus giving the name to the lake. From this lake she flowed as seven streams: three towards the east, three towards the west and the seventh stream followed Bhagiratha. The place was holy because it was in the neighbourhood of this lake that the sages Nara and Narayana performed their penance. Maya reached the place. He took all the gems that he had stored there. He took the conch and the gada. He had several hundreds of slaves to assist him in carrying the gems to the city of Indraprastha. He came back to the city and gave the gada to Bheema. Devadatta, the conch, was given to Arjuna.

Maya began the construction of the sabha. He wanted to make it the most beautiful sabha that ever was seen on the earth. It took him fourteen months to build it. It was indeed a remarkable creation. It excelled even Sudharma, the Sabha of Indra, in its splendour. In the garden, flowers bloomed in season and out of season. There were lotuses, jasmines, kuravakas, sirishas, tilakas and kadambas. These flowers were typical of only some seasons. But in the Mayasabha they were all blooming together. The walls of the hall gleamed and glistened with the precious gems embedded in them. It was built so cleverly that one could see only the glow from the gems and not the gems unless one looked for them. Maya went to the Pandavas and told them that the sabha was now ready. He took them round. He showed them the peculiarities of the great hall. They were speechless with amazement. Maya was ready to depart. He told Arjuna: "This chariot of yours is as powerful as the Sun and Agni. These noble steeds are unrivalled in the entire world. Your chariot has the monkey as its banner. You will be famed as Kapidhvaja hereafter. Because of your white horses, you will be famed by the name Swetavahana. May you be victorious and happy". Maya and Arjuna embraced each other. Yudhishthira honoured Maya with many gifts and bade him farewell.

On an auspicious day, the Pandavas entered the sabha. Gifts were distributed profusely to the poor and to brahmins. There was a great feast and the city was like the city of Indra. The fame of the sabha spread far and wide. People from all over the world came to see it. Rishis came from distant hills to see the sabha. All the kings came, all except the sons of Dhritarashtra. Several of the young princes who

came remained behind to learn archery from Arjuna. The chief among these students was Satyaki. His other name was Yuyudhana. He was a cousin of Krishna. Arjuna's old friend Chitrasena was there to spend some time with the Pandavas. The Pandavas were very happy.

Subhadra was now the mother of a son. His name was Abhimanyu. Draupadi was the mother of five sons, one by each one of the five Pandavas. Yudhishthira's son was Prativindhya. Bheema's son was Sutasoma. Arjuna's son was Srutakarman. Nakula's son was Sataaneeka. Sahadeva's son was named Srutasena. Kunti was now sure that her sons were well established and secure. They were quite powerful. It was not possible for anyone to harm the sons of Kunti. She thought of the days following the burning of the house of lac, of the months spent in Ekachakra where they had to beg for food. All those dark days were over. Their sun had risen. They were safe, secure from the evil thoughts of Duryodhana and Sakuni.

This peace was the lull before the storm. No one could know about it. Hardly a few months more, and the Pandavas would again wander over the face of the earth. The third Act of the tragedy was about to begin. In the march of life, several instances, incidents, stand out like milestones. They are landmarks. But we do not recognize them as such until we pass them by and look back. Such was the entrance of Draupadi into the lives of the Pandavas. Such was the entrance of Krishna into their lives. Such was to be, the entrance of Narada.

CHAPTER 2

NARADA'S VISIT TO INDRAPRASTHA

One day, the sage Narada came to the court of Yudhishthira. He was welcomed with reverence by the Pandavas and Draupadi. He had also heard about the Mayasabha. He had come to see it. Yudhishthira was only too happy to show him the hall. He looked like a little child with a new toy. He was so excited at the thought of displaying it. Narada looked at the hall and showed his enthusiastic approval. They came back to the hall where they were seated at the beginning. After some time spent in talking of indifferent things, Yudhishthira said: "My lord, you have travelled in all the three worlds. You must have seen many beautiful sabhas like the one I have. Can you tell me about them?" Narada smiled a gentle smile and said: "Yes. I have seen

similar sabhas in other worlds. I will tell you about them. But let me assure you, your sabha is the best on the face of this earth. There is no place to equal it. I will describe to you the great halls of Yama, Varuna, Indra, Rudra and Brahma. These are the beautiful sabhas I have seen".

Narada told them about the excellence of the places mentioned. He told them first about the sabha of Indra. He told Yudhishthira that the great king Harischandra of the race of the sun was sharing the throne with Indra. He went on to describe the other courts. When he came to the court of Yama, Narada told them about the many kings of the earth who were now there. It was a long list led by the names of Yayati and Nahusha. At the end of the list came the names of the later kings of the Kuru house, the last of them being Santanu and Pandu. Narada then described the courts of Varuna and Kubera. The narration came to an end.

Yudhishthira was silent for a while. Narada waited for him to speak. Yudhishthira said: "My lord, I have been listening intently to all that you have been saying. I noticed one thing. Most of the kings who were lords of this earth are all in the sabha of Yama and not, as I had been thinking all these years, in the sabha of Indra. I noticed something else too. You said that the friend of Indra, in fact his companion on the throne, is the great Harischandra, the king of the solar race. My lord, what good deeds has he performed that my father did not? Why should he have the honour of sharing the throne with Indra? My father was the purest of men. He never spoke a word of untruth. He was a saint among men. I want you to tell me the reason for this". Narada, who had come to Yudhishthira just for that, said: "Certainly I will tell you. The great Harischandra of the solar race was the son of Trisanku, the favourite of Viswamitra. Harischandra was a powerful monarch. He had conquered all the kingdoms on the earth and had performed the yaga called the Rajasuya. That is why he is eligible to share the same throne with Indra himself. The king who performs the Rajasuya stands out as someone different. I met your father. He said: "My sons are now powerful on the earth. If Yudhishthira performs the Rajasuya, I can go to Indraloka and so can my grandfather Santanu". This was the wish of your father. Yudhishthira, with your four brothers to help you and with Krishna by your side, it will be easy for you to perform the Rajasuya. You can conquer the entire world. You will be making it possible for your father and your ancestors Santanu and his sons to enter the sabha of Indra. It is not an easy task, I know. The yaga will have to be performed with great difficulty. But if there is anyone who is able

to do it, it is you and only you". Narada blessed the Pandavas and went away.

CHAPTER 3

YUDHISHTHIRA'S DESIRE

Ever since the coming of Narada, Yudhishthira was found to be always sunk in thought. Till now the life of the Pandavas was peaceful. Yudhishthira was never avaricious. The sons of Pandu were satisfied with their share of the ancient kingdom of the Kurus. Injustice had been meted out to them, no doubt, time and again, by the Kauravas. But they were good people. It was not in the nature of Yudhishthira to nurse grievances. He was happy with the land given to him by his uncle. He wanted to avoid quarrels. So he had accepted this barren land. Thanks to their Krishna, this barren land was made fruitful. Indra did it for them and they had called the place Indraprastha. They were very happy and contented. This sabha, the gift of Maya, was a great source of joy to Yudhishthira. He was now leading a peaceful life. Into this placid lake Narada threw the proverbial stone that set the waves in motion. Thoughts of conquest, till now strangers to the mind of Yudhishthira, began to occur in his mind everyday. That his father should have asked him to perform the Rajasuya was enough to make this peace-loving king to think of conquests. He placed the matter for consideration in the council hall. Everyone was very enthusiastic about it.

Yudhishthira sent for Krishna. Krishna was their guide and friend. He had to be consulted before anything could be decided. The messenger went to Dwaraka. He announced himself to Krishna and said: "Yudhishthira wants you in Indraprastha. He needs you there". Krishna took leave of Balarama and the others and hurried towards Indraprastha. Yudhishthira received him with open arms. Krishna felt that he was in the midst of his brothers, so warm was the reception he had. After he had rested for a while, he went to the hall where Yudhishthira was waiting for him.

Yudhishthira broached the subject that had been worrying him day and night. He told Krishna about the visit of Narada and the wishes of his father Pandu. After telling him everything in detail, Yudhishthira said: "Krishna, you are my real friend and well-wisher. The others are very very optimistic about it. Perhaps they say so to

please me. I do not know. But you are different. You will tell me the truth. You are beyond the reach of desires and of attachments. You can view everything in the clear white light of truth and truth is what I want now. Please advise me. I am all confused".

Krishna looked serious for a few moments. He was silent. He then began to consider the powers of all the kshatriyas. He said: "I am not worried about the others. But there is a king called Jarasandha. You know about him. He will be the most difficult opponent you will have to vanquish. It will not be easy at all. His good friend is Sisupala, the son of Damaghosha. There is also Dantavaktra who is an ally of Jarasandha. Bhagadatta, Rukmi the son of Bheeshmaka, and Paundraka Vasudeva are all the allies of this Jarasandha. He has friends in all the four quarters. Incidentally, Jarasandha is a sworn enemy of the Vrishni House. Kamsa, my uncle, was killed by me, as you know. He was Jarasandha's son-in-law. Jarasandha has therefore hated me ever since then. We have not been able to kill him. He has fought with us eighteen times; we have defied him but we could not defeat him. In fact, we became afraid of his constant raids. We therefore left the city of Mathura and built this Dwaraka. There, protected by the hill Raivataka on the one side and the sea on the other, we feel secure from Jarasandha and his attacks. His hill Girivraja is one hundred yojanas away from our hill Raivataka. Seeing us settled in Dwaraka, this man threw his mace at our Dwaraka. It was hurled with so much force that it travelled a distance of ninety-nine yojanas and became embedded in the ground. He does not bother us any more, after that. Yudhishthira, I have told you the names of the kings who are his friends. I will now tell you about others who are his probable friends. Let us consider Duryodhana, your sweet cousin. Do you not see that he will naturally side with Jarasandha, once he knows that he is your enemy? Duryodhana is sure to lend his support to Jarasandha. That means that all the Kaurava host, with Bheeshma, Drona and Kripa, will have to support him. Even if the elders desist from fighting because of their love for you, what about Radheya? He is always waiting for a chance to fight with Arjuna, to destroy Arjuna and thus please his friend. Radheya has in his possession all the divine astras which he obtained from Bhargava. Radheya has been able to defeat Jarasandha too. He is superior to Jarasandha. With such a formidable team of foes you have absolutely no chance of performing the Rajasuya. Jarasandha has captured ninety-eight kings and he keeps them imprisoned. He has an idea of making a sacrifice of royal heads to lord Sankara. The man is mad. But he is too powerful to be ignored or to be defeated. So long as this Jarasandha is alive, your hopes of performing the Rajasuya are thin indeed. If, however, we manage to

kill him, then there is nothing to worry about. The other kings, seeing him killed, will not have the courage to defy you and your brothers. This is my firm opinion. Think of a way to kill Jarasandha, and the rest is easy."

Yudhishthira abandoned the idea of performing the Rajasuya. He was not for it. He said: "Krishna, no one else is capable of stating the facts so clearly. No one else can give me such good advice. I thank you for it. I am not for these conquests. Consider the lives of all the great kings who have ruled this world. Those who were really great are the peace-loving kings. I see that the policy of peace is the most desirable thing in the world. I will give up this idea. Let us live in peace". Bheema, however, was not for this. He said: "My dear brother, any great undertaking will seem difficult in the beginning. That should not dampen our spirits or our enthusiasm. What cannot be achieved by might, can be achieved by wisdom. With our dear beloved Krishna to think up ways and means, with my Arjuna to support me, I think I will be able to kill Jarasandha. Together, we three can manage this. When we have Krishna on our side, I do not think failure can be thought of. You are too diffident. It will be easy to kill Jarasandha."

Krishna said: "No, Bheema. It is not so easy as you seem to think. Jarasandha is a great devotee of Sankara. He is favoured by the Lord. Again, he is a very righteous and generous man. He has won the affection of many kings. But, apart from the question of the Rajasuya, if you kill him you will be saving the lives of the captive kings who are meant to be sacrifices for Rudra. It is worth considering". Yudhishthira refused to countenance the idea. He said: "No. Bheema and Arjuna are my two eyes and Krishna, you are my mind. What is the use of living if I lose all three? I think the sensible thing will be to give up the idea entirely". Arjuna said: "Brother, why should we be afraid? We are born of a race of kshatriyas. We are warriors. We are familiar with the art of fighting. We have also learnt the use of divine astras. We have never swerved from the path of Dharma. Jarasandha is powerful, no doubt. But he is not a righteous king. A king, who uses his strength to persecute weaker kings, is not favoured by the gods. That is my feeling. All his prowess becomes futile if he is not just. It is not difficult to destroy such a man. God will favour the man who has Dharma on his side. It is our duty to destroy Jarasandha and rid the world of a powerful monster. We are sure to succeed in our attempt. Send the three of us to Magadha. After killing Jarasandha we will, all four of us, go to the four quarters and conquer the entire world and lay it at your feet".

Krishna appreciated the spirited talks of Bheema and Arjuna. He

said: "Bheema and Arjuna talk in a manner befitting the sons of a great warrior. Yudhishthira, we live in this world but once for a short time. Death is always imminent. It may come in the broad day or in the dead of the night. Because one does not fight, immortality is not granted to him. In this short span of life man should decide quickly on the course of action. There is no time to hesitate, to consider the pros and cons. There is no time to divide the swift mind. We must decide soon. Yudhishthira, we must make an attempt to meet Jarasandha and fight with him. We will try to reach the enemy's country and challenge him. We will enter the house of the enemy uninvited. We will try to realize our ambition. If we win, you will be lord of this earth. If we fail, why then, we will reach the heavens meant for those who die fighting. Either way, no shame will smirch our names". Yudhishthira said: "Krishna, tell me more about Jarasandha. What makes him so great that he is able to defy you? How is it that he was not destroyed like a moth which flirts with a flame, when he came near you? I cannot grasp this at all, that you have not been able to defeat him". Krishna recounted to them the story of Jarasandha's life.

CHAPTER 4

JARASANDHA

There was a powerful king who ruled the kingdom of Magadha. His name was Brihadratha. He was gifted with all that a kshatriya could wish for. He had his capital city at the foot of the hill called Girivraja. He was a very righteous man. His fame spread all over the world like the rays of the sun enveloping the earth. He married the princesses of Kasi. They were twins. The only misfortune in the life of the king was that he had not a child to continue the line. He became disgusted with life and went to the forest with his wives. In the forest lived a rishi called Chandakausika. The king worshipped him with reverence. Pleased by his devotion, the rishi asked him what caused him to renounce the world at such an early age. The king told him. The rishi took pity on him. A fruit fell on his lap from the mango tree under which he was sitting. Taking the fruit in his hand, Chandakausika said: "This fruit, when eaten by your wife, will give you a son. Do not stay in the forest. Go back to your kingdom and rule it well".

The king cut the fruit into two and gave it to his wives. In course of time they both gave birth to half a child each. The entire palace was horrified by the monstrosities that were born. The nurse wrapped up the pieces of the child and threw the separate pieces outside the city gates. That night a rakshasi by name Jara was looking for food, when she came across the two pieces of the child. She was pleased with this piece of luck. She was excited at the thought of eating the tender human flesh that she had found. In carrying the two pieces, it happened that she put them together. There happened a miracle. The body, now whole, became alive! She was amazed at the sight. She did not have the heart to kill the baby. She took it to the king and said: "Here is your son". She told him the entire story. The king was so happy, and so pleased with her, that he called the child Jarasandha since he was united by Jara. The sage Chandakausika came to the king and told him that his son was gifted with divine powers, that it would not be possible for any ordinary person to kill him, that he would be the favoured bhakta of Lord Sankara.

Krishna said: "Jarasandha is reputed to have seen the Lord of lords, Sankara, in person. Who can defy such a gifted man?" Yudhishthira sat silent. Krishna continued: "I told you about the gada which he hurled at us from the top of Girivraja. I must tell you that this gada was the seat of his strength. He tried to retrieve it from the ground. But he could not. Without the gada, Jarasandha is now vulnerable. He is no longer invincible as he once was. It is now possible to fight with him".

Yudhishthira was not for fighting with him. But Bheema and Arjuna were quite firm about it. Krishna said: "To defeat his army is impossible. Not even Indra with his heavenly host can do it. But I have a feeling that, in single combat, our Bheema will be able to kill him. Send the three of us, Yudhishthira. As Bheema said, we will combine all our resources and hit on a plan. You can send your brothers with me. I will be their keeper. We are sure to come back victorious".

Finally, Yudhishthira was coaxed to agree to the plan. Krishna, Bheema and Arjuna left for the great Magadha kingdom. They crossed the river Sarayu and then the river by name Gandaki. Thence they went to Mithila. Crossing the border of Mithila, they went in the direction of Magadha. They reached the banks of the river Ganga. They crossed Ganga. They could see from a distance the hill Girivraja. Soon they reached the capital city. There they saw an immense temple of Sankara. They worshipped the Lord there. Now they dressed themselves as snatakas. A snataka is one who has just finished his education. He is not a brahmacharin any more and he is not a grihastha

yet. As soon as these three entered the city, evil omens were apparent: omens which spelt calamity for the king. Krishna, Bheema and Arjuna entered the city, dressed in gay costumes, with garlands of flowers on their necks and with their bodies all perfumed with sandal paste. The strangers created a sensation by their unusual dress and appearance. They were dressed as brahmins but they looked like kshatriyas. The people in the city were puzzled by these strangers who walked like lions.

They entered the palace of the king by jumping over the wall. They did not enter through the gateway. Jarasandha was busy with his worship. He sent them milk and honey and asked them to wait till midnight when he would grant them an audience. They waited. It was now midnight. Jarasandha came to them and honoured them. He then said: "You seem to be snatakas. But your apparel belies it. You are using flowers and perfumes which no snataka is allowed to use. You have entered my palace in a novel manner. Friends enter through the gateway. Only enemies make this kind of entrance. Again, I was told that you have refused to partake of the milk and honey which I sent you. Whoever you may be, you are welcome to my city. You must receive, at least now, the worship due to brahmins. But whether you are brahmins or not, is yet to be seen. I think you are kshatriyas. Your shoulders are scarred like the shoulders of archers. I feel that you have disguised yourselves for some unknown reason. Please tell me the truth. Who are you and what do you want from me?"

Krishna said: "Jarasandha, you are right in your guess. We are here as your enemies. We entered your house by jumping over the wall because we have come to challenge you. We did not accept your hospitality since we are not friendly with you. Kshatriyas are famed for their action and not for sweet words. We have come with the intention of fighting with you". Jarasandha was intrigued. He said: "I do not know you at all; how can you say that you are my enemies? I have made many enemies, it is true. But not one of them is an enemy whom I have not seen. If you are my enemies, be kind enough to tell me the reason for your enmity, and I would like to know who you are".

Krishna said: "The reason for our enmity is the unlawful manner in which you have imprisoned kings as sacrifices for Rudra. We cannot brook your cruelty. We are here to uphold the rights of the helpless kings. How can you hope to reach heaven by killing fellow men? How can you please the lord of Dharma by doing such a sinful act as the killing of fellow kshatriyas? As for your ignorance about our identity, we will enlighten you. We do not mean to hide our identities from you. This is Arjuna, the third Pandava. This is Bheema, the younger brother

of Yudhishthira. I am Krishna, your old acquaintance. We have come to challenge you to single combat. You can choose any one of us and fight".

Jarasandha laughed loud and long. He looked at Krishna with supreme contempt in his eyes and said: "So you, who fled from me eighteen times, who now hides behind the skirts of Raivataka hill, you, I say, have the courage to challenge me in my home? It makes me laugh when I think you have worked up enough courage to face me. You talk like the autumn cloud which roars without bringing rain. Remember I am not Kamsa whom you killed so treacherously. I am Jarasandha, the favoured of the gods. I am not afraid of anyone. You came here desiring for a fight. I will certainly satisfy you. But I will not fight with you. Krishna, you are a coward. It is beneath my dignity to fight with my inferior. As for this Arjuna, he is still a child. It is not right to fight with one who is weaker than oneself. This young man, who is called Bheema, seems to be fairly well-built. He seems to be worthy enough to fight with me. I will fight with him". Jarasandha was sure of his victory. But because the ill omens spelt misfortune, he performed the coronation of his son Sahadeva and then began to fight with Bheema.

The fight was on. The two were equally matched. No one could say who was the better fighter. The fight went on for fourteen days and fourteen nights continuously. Krishna and Arjuna stood by and watched along with many others. Neither of the two would give in. It looked as though neither could be vanquished. But slowly Bheema had begun to gain the upper hand. Krishna encouraged him saying: "Bheema, remember who you are. Remember your father. You are the son of Vayu. Think of him and you will get the strength which can move mountains. You are the strongest and most powerful of all kshatriyas. You can tear him up if you want to". Hearing this Bheema prayed to his father for strength. He fought with new vigour now. He lifted up the form of Jarasandha and grasping the descending man, he took hold of his legs one in each hand, and tore him up in two. He felt that at last, he had achieved it. He looked at Krishna and Arjuna. Looking at their amazed faces, he turned round and saw what they saw. The two halves of the body of the king were now approaching each other. A moment more, and the king was rising up from the ground as though nothing had happened. The sight struck terror into the hearts of Bheema and Arjuna. Jarasandha was now to them invincible.

The fight was resumed. Krishna looked at Bheema and smiled at him. When he was able to manage it, Krishna caught the eye of Bheema. Krishna had a small leaf of a plantain in his hand. He

split the leaf into two. He then turned one piece round and threw the two pieces at two corners of the floor. Bheema understood what he was trying to say. Again, Bheema threw Jarasandha up in the air. He caught the descending form of the king by the legs. He tore him in two. Bheema now threw the two pieces at two corners of the hall such that one leg and one half of the head were corresponding. The halves did not join up any more. Jarasandha, the favoured of Sankara, was now dead.

There was panic in the palace. No one knew what to do. The three heroes pacified everyone, saying that nothing would hurt them. They ascended the chariot of Jarasandha and went up to the top of the hill Girivraja. There, in so many cells were found the imprisoned kings. They were all released. The kings were speechless with joy. Krishna said: "We do not want anything in return for this. The great Yudhishthira, the king of Indraprastha, is going to perform the Rajasuya. I want you all to attend it as the friends and allies of the king. That is all we want of you". They were only too happy to agree to this.

Krishna, Arjuna and Bheema returned to the palace of Jarasandha. Sahadeva, the son of Jarasandha, was there. Krishna went to him, took his right hand in his and said: "Be not afraid. Your father was a great man. But he used his greatness in wrong ways and hence he had to be killed. You have already been installed as king. You must now combine your father's valour with your gentleness and rule the kingdom justly". He told the young prince about the Rajasuya and asked him to attend it. Sahadeva listened with respectful attention and agreed to attend the Rajasuya.

Bheema had achieved the impossible. They returned to Indraprastha. Yudhishthira's happiness was great on seeing them alive. He came to receive them with open arms. He embraced them one by one, with tears in his eyes. Krishna said: "Yudhishthira, the one thorn which was in the way of your success has been removed by Bheema. The path is clear. Your Rajasuya can now be performed without any impediment". Yudhishthira wanted to know all about the fight. They told him. Bheema spoke to Yudhishthira about the miracle of Jarasandha coming to life in spite of his being torn asunder. It was a thrilling narration and Yudhishthira relived the horror and the triumph of the other three when they went through those terrible days.

Krishna set out for Dwaraka. He said: "I am glad to know that my journey to Indraprastha was not in vain. I will come back soon. In the meantime, send your brothers in the four directions and let them come back after their conquests. I will be here with all the Vrishni clan. But now I must go back". They had to agree.

Krishna was pleased at the thought that the Vrishnis need have

no more fear of Jarasandha. He wanted to tell them all about it himself. That was partly the reason for going back to Dwaraka. He sped towards his city, his heart exultant at the good fortune that had befallen them. Krishna was very happy.

CHAPTER 5

THE RAJASUYA

Indraprastha was caught in the throes of excitement. Yudhishthira was going to perform the Rajasuya. The preparations were in full swing. Vyaasa was there to lend his valuable assistance to Yudhishthira. It was decided to send the four brothers to the four quarters. Arjuna chose the north, Bheema the east, Nakula the west and Sahadeva the south. Arjuna, having conquered the countries on the way, reached the kingdom of Salva and defeated him easily. He proceeded further. He knew no defeat. He was well known by the name Vijaya. Arjuna reached the city called Pragjyotisha, ruled by the great Bhagadatta. Bhagadatta was a friend of Indra. He was a noble soul. He was one of the few who commanded respect from old and young alike. He was respected by the devas too. He was a righteous and good man. Arjuna and Bhagadatta fought for eight days and nights. Bhagadatta was defeated. He came to Arjuna with a friendly smile and said: "I am a great friend of your father. I am pleased with your valour which defeated even me. Tell me, what shall I do for you?" Arjuna honoured him by prostrating before him and told him about his brother and the hopes he had of performing the Rajasuya. He invited the war veteran to Indraprastha. Bhagadatta agreed with pleasure.

Arjuna proceeded towards the hill Ramagiri which was made holy because Sree Rama, in his wanderings, had stayed there for a few days. The waters there were sanctified because the princess Seeta had bathed in them. Arjuna now fought with the reputed Trigarta brothers. They were led by Susarman. Arjuna was able to defeat them. But it was then that there was born the great enmity between Arjuna and the Trigartas, which lasted till the very end of the great war which was fought later. They called themselves the Samsaptakas from then onwards; they had sworn that they would destroy Arjuna some day. They were great friends of Duryodhana. Arjuna left them and went further north. He reached the northernmost point. He saw the top of the mountain Meru, the king of mountains. He saw the top of the mountain

gleaming in the morning light, like a creation in gold. The pinnacle was veiled in a many-coloured glow. The radiance of the mountain could be seen for miles around. Enveloped in the rays of the sun, the proud peak seemed to defy the sun and return all his rays to him after beautifying itself with their glory. It was a sublime spectacle. The peak seemed to pierce the sky and reach the heavens. Arjuna stood there with his mind chastened to a strange humility. He stood for a long time in front of the magnificent giant. He prostrated before it and went his way with great unwillingness. He hoped that he would be able to go there again some day in the distant future.

On the southern slopes of the Meru is a creeper called Jambu. The entire slope is covered by this creeper. This is always full of flowers which are the favourites of the Siddhas who haunt the place. The creeper is so very typical of the place that the Siddhas and the Charanas call the place by the name Jambu Dveepa. That is how that name came to be given to Bharatavarsha. Arjuna saw the Jambu creepers. He then went to the mountain Gandhamadana. From there he began his return journey. After a pleasant and adventurous sojourn he returned to Indraprastha. All the way, wherever he went, Arjuna was given gems and riches and invaluable gifts. It was then that he got the name Dhananjaya.

Bheema went in the direction in which the sun rises. He passed the kingdom of Panchala. He then reached Mithila. He won the fight easily with the king of that country. He went to Chedi and met Sisupala. He told Sisupala about the Rajasuya to be performed by Yudhishthira. Sisupala received him with every show of affection and said that he would certainly be present on the great occasion. Bheema went towards Kosala, Ayodhya, and many other kingdoms. He conquered all of them. He went to Girivraja. He was honoured by Sahadeva, the boy king of Magadha. After reminding him about the Rajasuya, Bheema concluded his conquests and returned to Indraprastha, laden with riches from the east.

Sahadeva's tour was equally successful. He defeated the famous king by name Dantavaktra. Sreniman was another powerful king whom Sahadeva subdued. Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti were defeated. Sahadeva went to the city Mahishmati and fought with the king Neela. He conquered all the kingdoms in the south.

Sahadeva wanted to win the friendship of the rakshasa king Vibheeshana. He thought of his nephew Ghatotkacha. Ghatotkacha appeared before him and said: "What do you want me to do?" Sahadeva embraced him affectionately and said: "Ghatotkacha, I want you to go to the capital of Vibheeshana. It is called Lanka. Vibheeshana is the son of Pulastya. His brother was Ravana. I want you to invite him for the

Rajasuya". Ghatotkacha went to Lanka, the capital city of Vibheeshana. On the way he saw the bridge that had been built when Sree Rama crossed over to Lanka. He prostrated before it and went on his way. He reached Lanka. He went to the palace of the king. He announced himself to the door-keepers as the nephew of the Pandava king Yudhishthira. "Tell your king", he said, "that in the great Bharatavarsha, the great Pandavas, the friends of Krishna, are ruling in Indraprastha. Yudhishthira, the eldest of the Pandavas, is thinking of performing the Rajasuya. I have been sent by his youngest brother Sahadeva with a message for your king". They carried his message to their king. Vibheeshana asked him to be brought to the court. Ghatotkacha saw the great Vibheeshana. Remembering that he was a devotee of Sree Rama of the Ikshwaku house, Ghatotkacha bowed down before him and stood by in respectful silence. Looking at Vibheeshana and his gentle noble face, Ghatotkacha was reminded of his own uncle Yudhishthira. There was a great deal of resemblance between these two good men. Ghatotkacha was welcomed with sweet words. Vibheeshana said: "You are welcome to Lanka. Tell me more about the Pandavas. I would like to know all about them and about Yudhishthira who, you say, is the son of Dharma". Ghatotkacha was only too happy to talk about his uncles and his father. He told Vibheeshana that his father was the son of Vayu. He told Vibheeshana all about the Pandavas and their valour. Vibheeshana was pleased to hear about the Pandavas, their goodness and their valour, and their love for Krishna. He gave many costly gifts and gems and sent Ghatotkacha back after honouring him as the envoy of a great monarch. Sahadeva was very pleased with his nephew for carrying out his mission so successfully.

Sahadeva went to the Pandya kingdom. He reached the city of Chitrangadaa, the wife of Arjuna. She received him with great affection. Her father was very happy to meet the brother of Arjuna. He showed him Babhruvahana the son of Arjuna and Chitrangadaa. Sahadeva invited them to attend the Rajasuya. He concluded his tour and returned to Indraprastha, laden with gifts from all the kings he met.

Nakula had already arrived after a victorious tour of the west. He had met the Vrishnis at Dwaraka and had invited Vasudeva the father of Krishna and Balarama. All the other Vrishni heroes were also invited to attend the Rajasuya.

Krishna arrived soon after. He brought gifts of a thousand kinds to honour Yudhishthira. Yudhishthira received him with great joy. Krishna and Vyaasa made all the arrangements for the Rajasuya. Vyaasa performed the preliminary rites. Messengers were sent to all the kings inviting them all. Yudhishthira sent Nakula to Hastinapura to invite the elders Bheeshma, Drona, Dhritarashtra, Baahlika, Somadatta,

Bhoorisravas, and the sons of the king. Nakula was asked to invite each of them individually on Yudhishthira's behalf. He wanted Sakuni and all his sons, and the noble Radheya, to be invited personally. Nakula reached Hastinapura and was received with affection by Bheeshma and all the elders. He told them respectfully about the desire of Yudhishthira to perform the Rajasuya. He told all of them, one by one, that his brother was eagerly awaiting their early arrival in Indraprastha. He returned to Indraprastha with their blessings.

The guests began to arrive one by one. All the kings were there. The city was filled with the beautiful mansions which had been built for the accommodation of the many princes. It looked like the city of the gods. Wealth was literally pouring into the treasury of Yudhishthira. Krishna had asked Duryodhana to be in charge of the treasury. Duryodhana saw the homage paid to the Pandavas. He saw their glorious state. He spoke not a word about the feelings in his heart. But his heart was fuming with envy for these cousins of his who had managed to become so wealthy and so very powerful in spite of his repeated attempts to destroy them. His heart was ready to break. But he did not let anyone guess his feelings or the hatred which threatened to consume him.

The Rajasuya was in progress. It was becoming a grand success. In the midst of so much excitement and so much anticipation, the day of the coronation had come. It was a very impressive event. All the rishis were there to shower their blessings on Yudhishthira. Narada was there. His mind was not in the present. It was busy with thoughts of the future. He saw Krishna sitting there, near the throne, with his eternal smile on his lips. But Narada saw him as the pivot around which the future of Bharatavarsha was to revolve. The Krishna he saw did not have a smile on his lips. His eyes were grave and sad. His expression was stern. Narada turned his eyes to Yudhishthira. He saw the innocent monarch who was to be the cause of the destruction of the entire race of kshatriyas. He looked at Draupadi and saw the predictions about her about to come true. Duryodhana was even now biting his lips to hold back the envy and fury in his heart. Sakuni with his crafty eyes was watching the whole show. A smile of disdain could be seen on his thin lips. Narada looked at Radheya, the noble Radheya, the greatest giver of all times. Poor ill-fated Radheya! Narada saw, as in a picture, the death of Radheya at the hands of his brother who knew him not. He saw all the sons of the blind king being killed by Bheema. He saw the war-field, the great Kurukshetra, strewn with the bodies of all these many kshatriyas. Bhagadatta, Vinda, Anuvinda and this entire galaxy of princes were on the battle-field,

dead. Detached as he was from all earthly bonds, Narada's mind was filled with a vast pity for all these princes who were doomed—everyone of them.

CHAPTER 6

KRISHNA, THE GUEST OF HONOUR

The coronation was over. It was now the duty of the king to honour the guests. Bheeshma addressed Yudhishthira and said: "My child, Yudhishthira, these kings and rishis have come here to honour you and grace the yaga with their presence. It is now your duty to welcome each one of them with arghya and honour them. It is but right that you should show your gratitude to all these kings and sages. But you must decide in your mind about the guest of honour. You must select him and he must be worshipped first". Yudhishthira was embarrassed by the delicate task that was assigned to him. He said: "My lord, I am ignorant about these matters. You are my grandfather. You must tell me who ought to be given the seat of honour". Bheeshma was silent for just one moment. Then he said: "In this great and glorious assembly of princes of noble houses, this Krishna shines as the sun in the midst of his own rays. Without him, this hall will lose all its grandeur. He is the person whom I suggest as the greatest of them all". Yudhishthira was only too happy to honour Krishna who was everything to him. Krishna stood for everything dear and sacred to the Pandavas. Yudhishthira asked Sahadeva to bring the articles necessary for worship. Sahadeva sat at the feet of Krishna. With tears streaming from his eyes, he took the blessed feet in his hands and washed them lovingly. The arghya was given. The pooja was over. Flowers rained on Sahadeva and Krishna.

There was silence in the assembly. Some of the heroes did not like the honour paid to Krishna. They did not seem to be pleased with the selection. They looked at each other in silent disapproval. But no one spoke a word. No one, except Sisupala, the lord of the Chedis. He could not brook this insult offered to the others. Nor could he bear to see the honour paid to Krishna. When the pooja was over, there was a rain of flowers on Krishna and Sahadeva; the hall was silent. No one spoke even a word. The silence lasted a moment, just one moment. The assembly was roused from its apathy by a loud laugh.

Sisupala was standing up. He said: "Very nice! Very nice indeed! Here is a bastard who asks the son of a river for advice. The advice is given. The special honour as the best amongst us is given to a cowherd. The pooja is performed by another bastard. The heavens rain flowers on this beautiful scene. All the time, kings, who are great warriors, who are jealous of their honour, look on, like dumb animals. Can I say anything else? Very nice indeed!" He sat down. No one spoke a word. Laughing again, Sisupala addressed Yudhishthira: "My dear Yudhishthira, either you are able to see more than we can, or you can see nothing at all. When there are so many worthy people in this assembly, I cannot see the reason behind this inane action of yours. I thought that the Pandavas were princes endowed with a proper sense of decorum. I never thought that you were capable of doing a wrong thing. Look! Look on this assembly of kings. When so many of them are here, it is lunacy to think that this son of a cowherd is the greatest of them all. It is evident that you are short-sighted. Can you not see that you have displeased many of the monarchs here? We came to attend your Rajasuya yaga, not because we are not powerful enough to defy you, but because we have great respect for you. We were under the impression that you were a righteous person. It was to please you that we attended this function".

Bheema's hands were clenched. He looked furious. With trembling lips, Arjuna was trying to catch his brother's eye for his permission to take up the Gandiva. Sahadeva's eyes were spitting fire. Nakula had his hand already on the hilt of his sword. Krishna was just unruffled. He looked at them and smiled as if to say: "Do not be excited. Leave him to me".

Sisupala continued his tirade. He said: "Here is Vasudeva. He is senior to many of the kings here. There is Drupada, your father-in-law. If you had wanted to honour old age, Vasudeva should have been your choice. If you had wanted to honour a relative, Drupada is here. If you consider that your acharya is worthy of respect, there is Drona, and then Kripa and Aswatthama. If you had wanted a man rich in penance, there is Vyaasa your ancestor. If you had wanted a great hero, there is Bheeshma. Is there such a dearth of heroes in this assembly that you should have chosen Krishna for the seat of honour? If you had the intention of honouring an archer, here is Ekalavya, the son of Hiranyadhanus. He is the greatest archer now. He is far better than your Arjuna. Again, here is Radheya, the favourite pupil of Bhargava. He is one of the few who has defeated Jarasandha, a feat which was impossible for your guest of honour. He is the greatest archer too, and he has been overlooked and Krishna has been chosen. What about Bhagadatta? Kalinga? Virata? Dantavaktra? Salya? Salva? Kambhoja?

Vinda? Anuvinda? Are you mad, Yudhishthira, to think that Krishna is greater than all these people? If you think that you have done a wise thing, you are sadly mistaken. This man is neither your guru, nor your dear son-in-law nor your dear favourite, who has to be pacified at any cost. You seem to have asked us all to this Rajasuya just to insult us. Till now you had been considered to be a righteous man. You have lost your reputation now".

No one could speak. Sisupala's voice rolled on. Everyone was listening as if spell-bound. His voice rose with his mounting fury. He said: "I feel highly insulted. All that Krishna has done so far, he has achieved by mere deceit. He killed his uncle Kamsa when he was sleeping. He took your credulous brothers to the home of Jarasandha, the great hill Girivraja. You thought that he went there to be of help to you. Not at all. My friend Jarasandha was the one man whom Krishna could not win over with his sweet words. Krishna was mortally afraid of the powerful Jarasandha. So, using this fool Bheema as his tool, he killed Jarasandha. Your offering the agrapooja to this cowherd is foolish, senseless. It is as stupid as giving your daughter to a eunuch, as foolish as showing beauty to a blind man. The others here may put up with this insult. I, for one, cannot". With these words Sisupala strode out of the sabha like an angry lion.

Yudhishthira followed him and tried to pacify him. He was very unhappy at the turn of events. He said: "You must not speak thus. The advice given by my grandfather was accepted by all here. If I have hurt you or insulted you, I am sorry. You must forgive me. There was no thought of insulting you or anyone here when I honoured Krishna. To us, he is greater than anyone else". Perhaps the words of Yudhishthira might have pacified Sisupala. But Bheeshma intervened and said: "Yudhishthira, why do you speak so softly to this man who insults Krishna? How can he, with his narrow vision, see the greatness of Krishna? Krishna is fit to be honoured, not by us alone but by all the three worlds. I do not see how anyone else can be thought fit enough for this high honour. As for this Sisupala, do not pay any heed to his mad and jealous ravings". Sahadeva said to Sisupala: "I did the correct thing. There is no one greater to us than Krishna. He is our guru, our friend, our well-wisher. He means everything to us. If you do not like this honour paid to Krishna, I am prepared to fight with you. You are insulting Krishna. Please do not think that you will be allowed to live without being punished for your words".

Sisupala's eyes were now red with wrath. The friends of Sisupala were just as furious. The anger passed from one to the other. The hall was now resounding with the voices of the angry kings. The clash

of steel could be heard. Yudhishthira told Bheeshma: "I am afraid the kings are all getting excited. I do not know what is to be done. Please tell me what I should do at this juncture". Bheeshma said: "Do not be afraid, my child. Here is a dog trying to bark at the lion. He need not be considered at all. Let him talk if he likes to. His voice seems to please him". Sisupala could not brook the casual manner in which Bheeshma referred to him and his anger. Sisupala now began to heap insults on Bheeshma. He sneered at him and his so-called righteousness which was just hypocrisy. He heaped a thousand insults on the old veteran of the Kuru house. He jeered at him and his oath, the oath which was the most sacred thing to Bheeshma. He called him a eunuch and said that he was not for taking a woman because he was a eunuch and not because he wanted to be true to his oath. He called him the son of a river. This term was used in the most insulting sense. It meant that since a river flows from a higher level to a lower level, the son of a river has the same temperament, descending from higher things to lower ones. It meant that a river was common to all, that she welcomed everyone with the same ardour. It was the greatest insult that Sisupala could think of and the hall was thunderstruck at the audacity of this man who had dared to insult the mother of Bheeshma, Ganga, the holiest of holy rivers, Ganga whose source was the feet of Lord Vishnu and whose landing place was the matted locks of the Lord of lords, Sankara. Bheema was now uncontrollable. He looked at Bheeshma and said: "Grandfather, how is it that you are silent? Here is a man insulting you. He is insulting Krishna. He talks ill of two people who are dearer to us than our very lives. Please give me a chance to kill him. I must kill Sisupala". Bheeshma said: "Bheema, do not be in a hurry. It has been ordained by the gods that this man will be killed by our Krishna. He has to meet his end at the hands of Krishna and only Krishna. Let us leave everything to Krishna. I will tell you the story of Sisupala and the prophecy that Krishna is meant to be the killer of Sisupala.

CHAPTER 7

THE KILLING OF SISUPALA

Bheeshma said: "When Sisupala was born, he had three eyes and four arms. His parents were just horrified at the monstrosity that was born to them. They were told by a heavenly voice that as soon as the

child was placed on the lap of the man who was to kill him, the extra eye and arms would disappear. The mother was worried about the future of her child. She would place the child on the laps of all the people who came to see it. Once, when Krishna and Balarama went to see the child of Damaghosha, the mother of Sisupala placed the child on their laps as was her custom. As soon as it touched the lap of Krishna, the child lost its extra eye and arms. Sisupala's mother was unhappy at the thought that her child would be killed by his own cousin, Krishna. She was the sister of Vasudeva. She requested Krishna to spare her son. Krishna was sorry for his aunt and her grief. He said: "Please do not be worried. I will forgive even a hundred insults which your son may hurl at me. I will try not to hurt you".

Time passed. Rukmi, the son of Bheeshmaka, was a great friend of this Sisupala. He wanted to give his sister to Sisupala in marriage. But Rukmini was in love with Krishna. She sent word to him and he carried her away on the day she was to have married Sisupala. Ever since then, Sisupala has been nursing a grievance against Krishna. He cannot bear to hear the praises of Krishna, nor can he bear to see the honour paid to Krishna. One can understand the jealousy of a smaller man for one who is far superior to him. He has been insulting Krishna in an unending stream. The hundred insults which Krishna had promised to forgive, have been exhausted long ago. It is just a matter of moments before Krishna does the needful. Do not do anything rash, Bheema. Fate is there to punish Sisupala for his wrongdoings."

Sisupala's patience was now at an end. He was tired of words, words, words. He challenged Bheeshma and he challenged Krishna. He said: "Come, fight with me. Let the world see who is the better man. This is not like stealing a bride and running away with her without fighting with anyone. This is not like stealing the clothes of helpless women when they are bathing in the river. This is not like stealing the loves of Gopi women and cheating their husbands. Krishna, this is a man-to-man fight that I am suggesting. Let me see if you can fight straight for once".

Krishna was hoping that this unpleasantness would be avoided. He loved Yudhishthira too much. He did not want the Rajasuya to be spoilt by this fight and the killing of Sisupala. He was trying to ignore the insults of Sisupala. He did not lose his poise even when he was deliberately and very methodically provoked by Sisupala. But this challenge had to be accepted. It had to be taken up. It was the rule among kshatriyas that no challenge should ever be refused. Unwillingly he prepared himself for a fight with this braggart. Bheeshma led him to the chariot.

Krishna addressed the kings who had assembled there. He said: "I want this entire assembly to know the many crimes this man is guilty of. From the beginning, this man has been the hated enemy of the House of the Vrishnis. He is the son of a princess who is a daughter of the Vrishni house. But he has been hating them all his life. When I had gone to the city called Pragjyotisha, this man entered the city of Dwaraka and set fire to it. When my grandfather Ugrasena was in the hill Raivataka with all his people, this man assaulted them and harassed all of them. When my father, his uncle, had despatched the sacrificial horse, this Sisupala captured the horse just to disturb the sacrifice of my father. It is this man who steals the wives of others. When the wife of Babhruvahana, a Yadava, was travelling to Sauvira, the neighbouring country, this man kidnapped her and molested her. He carried away another maid called Bhadra and many of the women of Dwaraka, just to please himself and the king of Karusha. Jarasandha was the enemy of the House of the Vrishnis. That was the reason why Sisupala became a good friend of Jarasandha. Sisupala has caused us endless trouble. I have told you some of them. I have not the time nor the patience to relate all the atrocities perpetrated by him. I would have killed him long ago. But my promise to my aunt, his mother, held me back. I had told her that I would forgive a hundred insults from this man. That number has been exceeded long ago. Still I was patient. But now, he has challenged me. I do not want to see anything unpleasant happen here today. But I have to kill this sinner who has become impossible. I can no longer bear the insults he has been heaping on me and on Bheeshma the Kuru ancient. I am ready to fight and rid the world of this sinner".

Krishna ascended the chariot driven by Daruka. With his eyes red with wrath, Sisupala looked at Krishna as a moth looks at a flame. The fight began. The kings stood still, stunned by the unexpected turn of events. Of these, the most unhappy was Yudhishthira. He saw several evil omens. He went to Narada and asked him to explain the omens. Narada said that they all pointed to a great calamity which was imminent. They all pointed to the death of Sisupala. It was all very depressing to Yudhishthira who hated unpleasantness of any kind. He watched the fight with sad eyes. Bheeshma, on the other hand, looked as though he had become young again. He was watching the fight with flashing eyes and with a smile on his lips.

The fight was drawing to a close. Krishna took up his chakra and hurled it against Sisupala. There was a look of infinite love in his eyes when he did this. The chakra coursed through the air like the sun, and cut the head of Sisupala from his body. He fell on the ground like a huge tree suddenly felled by an axe. A glow left

the body which was on the ground. It did not rise upwards towards the sky. It approached Krishna. It reached his feet and was lost in his blessed feet. All eyes were watching this. No one could understand this or the look of infinite love and happiness in the eyes of Krishna, no one except Krishna himself. He had fulfilled his promise to his beloved attendants, Jaya and Vijaya. He had released one of them from human bondage forever and ever. Dantavaktra would soon be freed too. These were the thoughts in the mind of Krishna.

The death of Sisupala was followed by terrible upheavals in nature. The heavens rained without any reason. Earthquakes were evident. The sea threatened to overleap its boundary. These omens spelt some dreadful calamity as a result of this death. The killing of Sisupala meant something terrible for the entire world. That was the interpretation given to them by the many rishis who had assembled there.

Most of the kings were angry with Krishna for what he had done. The friends of the Pandavas were very pleased. But generally there was more dissatisfaction apparent than approval. But no one had the courage to express any opinion. The great Rajasuya, which had begun so well, ended disastrously. This incident spoilt the happiness of all. But nothing could be done about it. Nothing can stop the determined course of destiny.

CHAPTER 8

WHEN DRAUPADI LAUGHED

The kings were all ready to leave for their countries. Yudhishthira was busy honouring them properly. He paid homage to the great rishis who had graced the occasion by their presence. Krishna came to him and said that the time had come when he had to return to Dwaraka. With great unwillingness, Yudhishthira gave him leave to go back. Honoured by all the Pandavas and by Draupadi, Subhadra and Kunti, Krishna bade them adieu with tender and smiling looks. As was their custom, the Pandavas took the reins of his horses in their hands and they accompanied him part of the way. They then returned to Indraprastha. These partings from Krishna left them very depressed and lost. Krishna was their very life. Little did they know that it was the last time they were bidding him farewell from Indraprastha. They did not know the dreadful fate that was waiting for them. They would

be made to lose all that they had in a few days. Their next meeting with Krishna would be in Kamyaka.

The Pandavas returned to the city. It was empty since all the guests had left, all except Duryodhana, Dussasana, Sakuni and Radheya. They were staying on to see the sabha. Yudhishthira was so pleased at the thought that they were staying on. He felt flattered by it. He heaped honours on them and tried to make their stay as pleasant as possible.

Vyaasa came to Yudhishthira to take leave of him. He was ready to go. After honouring him, Yudhishthira fell at his feet to receive his parting blessings. Vyaasa said: "By the grace of God, you have now performed the Rajasuya. You have become the lord of the earth. You have done what your father wished you to do. You have pleased him. I am happy. Please let me go now. I have seen the performance of the Rajasuya". Yudhishthira said: "My lord, I want you to tell me the meanings of the omens which followed the death of Sisupala. The wise say that they do not mean well for the world. Narada said that dreadful calamity is in store for the world. Please tell me what is to happen".

Vyaasa's face became grave and sad. He looked kindly at the king of the earth, Yudhishthira, and said: "You are right, my child. This event, this killing of Sisupala, was unfortunate. Evil omens have attended it. It means that you will have a spell of bad luck lasting for fourteen years. That is not all. With you as the cause, Fate has planned the destruction of all the kshatriyas on the face of this earth. The wrong-doing of Duryodhana, the power of Bheema and that of Arjuna, the anger of your queen Draupadi, will all be instrumental for this universal destruction. I can see that you are unhappy to hear my words. But there is no use in grieving. The ways of Fate cannot be understood by man nor can they be altered." With these dubious words of comfort Vyaasa went away. Yudhishthira was sunk in the depths of despair. The fact that he was to be the cause of the death of all the kshatriyas of the world was something he could not grasp. He could not think; he could not speak to anyone about it.

Duryodhana, in the meantime, was walking in the great hall of Maya. He had not seen the like of it before. He was amazed at the beauty and splendour of the creation of Maya. That this good fortune should have befallen the Pandavas, was something he could not bear. Now this sabha had a peculiar feature. It was built by the architect of the asuras, who had installed several gadgets there. The person, who looked at the sabha with jealousy in his heart for the man who owned it, would be deceived by many things there. When Duryodhana

was walking about, he saw what looked like an expanse of water. He went near and saw that it was just the floor which was inlaid with beautiful slabs of marble. He smiled and walked across it. Actually it *was* a pond of marble filled with very clear water. To the jealous eyes of Duryodhana this was not evident. The poor prince fell inside and was drenched. Even the many servants about were amused by this mishap to the Kuru prince. They gave him dry clothes at the command of Yudhishthira who was very much concerned at this. Bheema, Arjuna and the twins, and their queen Draupadi laughed at his discomfiture. Other happenings added to his pain. Once he walked carefully across what he thought was an expanse of water. Actually there was no water. Duryodhana cut a sorry figure. He once thought that there was a doorway and walked through it. There was no door and he hit his head against a blank wall and hurt himself. Peals of laughter greeted him. It was Draupadi who laughed at him and his humiliation. This was just awful. Duryodhana had to look unconcerned. He walked out of the hall in great anger.

He took leave of the Pandavas and left Indraprastha. His heart was near the point of breaking. He would not talk to anyone. Not even to his dear brothers and friends. He sat for hours alone in his chamber and he thought of the way he had been cheated by Providence. "The Pandavas, I think, are favoured by the gods. When they were sent to Varanavata I was sure I would see them no more. But that fool Purochana bungled. They became stronger than they were before. They became the sons-in-law of the powerful Drupada. They were dismissed with a barren strip of land. They have made it fruitful. On top of all that, they have now become masters of the world. Yudhishthira has performed the Rajasuya. He has been acclaimed as the monarch of the entire world". Thoughts like these were chasing each other in his mind. He spent days and nights together in solitude refusing to talk to anyone. He sat alone hugging his grief to his heart.

The childhood jealousy in the heart of this unfortunate prince had turned into hatred and now it became an obsession with him. He was not like his father in some things. His father, for instance, was just an avaricious man. But in the case of Duryodhana, it was not just avarice. It was something more than that. Dhritarashtra's avarice was in his heart. He was a coward. He could cover up his thoughts with a cloak of hypocrisy. But Duryodhana hated hypocrisy. He was frank. He did not like the involved reasonings of his father to whom caution was the watchword. Dhritarashtra dared not express his feelings. Duryodhana revelled in speaking his mind.

It will not be out of place here, to try and find out what made the young prince what he was. Duryodhana was a noble prince. The

one instance, when he made Radheya the king of Anga, was enough to prove that generosity was his second nature. Later, when he was ruling the kingdom during the memorable thirteen years, we hear that people were happy under his rule. He was a good man. But he was cursed with one tragic flaw: ENVY.

It was envy which was the cause of his downfall. Shakespeare's words fit him so aptly:

So oft it chances in particular men
That, for some vicious mole of nature in them,
As in their birth,—wherein they are not guilty,
Since nature cannot choose her origin,—
By the o'ergrowth of some complexion,
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason;
Or by some habit, that too much o'er-leavens
The form of plausive manners;—that these men,—
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,
Being nature's livery or fortune's star,—
Their virtues else,—be they as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergo,—
Shall in the general censure take corruption
From that particular fault : the dram of ale
Doth all the noble substance of a doubt
To his own scandal .

This is an apt summing up of the tragedy of Duryodhana. He was a sweet-natured person as far as his people and friends were concerned. But his envy of the five Pandavas was a fire burning his entire life. This one fault led to his fall.

When Drona first came to Hastinapura he met all the princes. He was charmed by the behaviour of Arjuna. He called Aswatthama and said: "My dear Arjuna, from now on, my son Aswatthama will be your friend for life". But Aswatthama did not take to Arjuna. Instead, he became a great friend of Duryodhana. In the end he sacrificed himself, his everything, for the sake of his friend. He did not hesitate to commit the deadliest of crimes, the midnight massacre in the camp of the Pandavas. He did it to please Duryodhana.

Again, it is worth noticing that, when the great war began, the Pandavas with all their righteousness could command only seven akshouhinis of troops as against the eleven of Duryodhana. The whole world knew that the cause of the Pandavas was just and that the behaviour of Duryodhana was unforgivable. But he had more numbers on his side than the Pandavas whose supporters were there more because they were bound to them by ties of blood than anything else. Bheeshma the Kuru

veteran fought for Duryodhana. Bhagadatta fought on his side and even Salya who was coming to the Pandavas with the honest intention of helping them, was so overpowered by the charm of Duryodhana that he promised to fight for him against the children of his sister. Indeed, this poor unfortunate prince must have been gifted with great charm and magnetism. Radheya, who was such a righteous man, was to devoted to Duryodhana that he died fighting for an unjust cause. Balarama loved Duryodhana in preference to Bheema.

That such a prince, of a heart so golden, capable of so much generosity, so accomplished in all the arts that grace a true kshatriya, should have found himself a slave to this overpowering passion, is, indeed, tragic. If it had not been for this, Duryodhana would have been great indeed.

CHAPTER 9

THE SABHA AT JAYANTA

Sakuni could not let this state of affairs continue for long. He tried again and again to talk to Duryodhana. Finally he succeeded. Duryodhana told him everything that happened at Indraprastha. He added: "Unless and until I see the destruction of the Pandavas I cannot be happy. I must get the better of them. Uncle, you say you love me. If you do really love me, then think out a plan which will make me master of the world". Sakuni said: "My dear child, you have seen for yourself how powerful they have become. They can never be defeated if we fight them in a war. But I have a weapon which is more powerful than mere steel. I can make all that immense wealth yours. Not a drop of blood will be shed. Nor will any blame be attached to your name. Shed off this depression and listen to me". Duryodhana could not believe his ears. He listened to his uncle as he revealed his dastardly plot. Sakuni, with his crafty smile playing on his thin lips, spoke to his nephew: "This great Yudhishthira has one terrible weakness, gambling". Duryodhana did not know what he was trying to say. He waited for his uncle to continue.

Sakuni spoke again. "Yudhishthira, as I said before, has one terrible weakness. He loves gambling, but he does not know how to play. I will use this to serve our ends. I am extremely clever at throwing the dice. There is no one in this world who can play against me and win. I will do what will please you, by using this skill of

mine. You must invite Yudhishthira to a game of dice. I will make him gamble away his entire kingdom. You must tell your father and get his permission. It will then be like taking a toy from the hand of a child. I can do it for you, easily. Get your father's consent". Duryodhana said: "You will be able to convince father more easily than I can, about the safety of this strategy. Safety is father's watchword. He is always afraid of Vidura. Uncle, you must go to my father and convince him that this is a safe plan". Sakuni agreed to do it.

This scheming mentor of the prince went to the king. He told him that Duryodhana was very unhappy ever since he came back from Indraprastha. He said: "You must send for him and comfort him. It is not right that your son, your eldest son, should be so unhappy". The king sent for his son. He said: "Duryodhana, what is this I hear, my child? What has made you so unhappy? You are dearer to me than my very life. Tell me the cause of your depression. If I can, I will try to rectify it". Duryodhana said: "You can hear the cause of my depression". He told his father all that happened at Indraprastha. He told him about the envy that was burning in his heart. He said: "When the star of the Pandavas is in the ascent, is it surprising that I am unhappy? Do you expect me to sing the praises of 'those well-behaved children'—to use your expression? All of you seem to be doing nothing else. I hate them. I want their wealth. I want their glory to be extinguished. I want them destroyed. I cannot be happy till this is achieved". Sakuni thought that the proper moment had come. He brought up the subject of gambling and told the king how easy it would be for him to gain all that Duryodhana wanted so badly. He said: "Summon them to our Hastinapura. Yudhishthira will gamble away his entire fortune. I am sure of it".

Duryodhana jumped at this suggestion. He said: "You must allow this, father. You must". Dhritarashtra was afraid. He said: "I do not know if my ministers will allow this. I must consult them". Duryodhana was impatient. He said: "Father, you know full well that your ministers, led by uncle Vidura, will never sanction this. If you consult them and try to keep me away from 'these sinful thoughts', as you are fond of saying, you can be sure that I will kill myself. I will". He was silent for a moment. Then he said: "You can then be happy with your beloved Yudhishthira, one image of Dharma, and your beloved Vidura, another image of Dharma. You need not think of me". Dhritarashtra had to agree. He said: "All right. I will not ask anyone. Sakuni, go. Get the architects to build a beautiful hall in Jayanta, the suburb of Hastinapura. When it is finished, you can invite the sons of Pandu to see this sabha. You can have your game of dice, and I

leave it all in your hands." This was what they wanted. Sakuni and Duryodhana went away, their hearts singing with joy.

The building of the sabha was begun. News of this reached Vidura. He went to the king and said: "What is all this I hear about a sabha being built in Jayanta? I hear that the Pandavas are to be invited. What is the reason behind this sudden hospitality? I also heard something about a game of dice which is to be played. What has come over you, my brother? The Pandavas are happy in their far-away city. You and your son Duryodhana have got rid of them. They have been almost banished from here. They are so far away from you. Can you not be happy now? Are you not satisfied? Why are you so merciless towards the sons of your brother? You are indeed heartless!" Dhritarashtra was not pleased with the words of Vidura. Vidura continued his pleading. He said: "This enterprise of yours is not good for you. This game of dice will be the cause of some new dissension among the children. Please stop the preparations". Dhritarashtra spoke in a querulous voice. He said: "Nothing of the kind will happen. After all, dice is a game played by princes. It will be just a pastime to spend the time pleasantly. In my presence and that of Bheeshma, nothing will happen. Even if anything does happen, it will not be very bad. Whatever you may say, whatever may happen, this game of dice has my full sanction and my approval". Vidura was extremely displeased with the words of his brother and his behaviour. But he had to be quiet. The king seemed bent on destroying himself and his son too.

The building of the sabha was over. Dhritarashtra was more excited than even Duryodhana. He sent for Vidura and said: "I want you to go to Khandavaprastha. You must tell my son Yudhishthira these words, my wishes: 'I have built a beautiful sabha. I hear that a sabha has been built for you by Maya. Come and see this sabha of mine. I want you to come and spend some days with me. You can have a happy time playing dice which you like very much'. Yudhishthira will not disobey me. He will come. Bring him here as soon as you can". Poor Vidura made another unsuccessful attempt to avert the calamity. But the old king was adamant. With a heavy heart, Vidura left for Indraprastha.

Chapter 10

FAREWELL TO INDRAPRASTHA

Yudhishthira received Vidura with a great deal of affection. The sons of Pandu were very fond of their uncle Vidura. After they were seated, Yudhishthira looked at Vidura and said: "Uncle, your face does not register any happiness. On the contrary you look sad. Are you not well? Or is someone unwell in Hastinapura? Is my uncle keeping good health? What makes you look so unhappy? Please tell me". Vidura said: "Your uncle is enjoying excellent health and so are his sons. No one is unwell. Dhritarashtra has sent you a message through me". Vidura repeated the words spoken by the king. Yudhishthira was intrigued by the message. He knew his uncle well enough by now to scent some treachery. But the message was innocuous enough. He was silent for a while. Finally he said: "There is more in this than meets the eye. You say that the king wants us to go to Hastinapura to play a game of dice with his sons. I have a feeling that the game of dice is the kernel of this whole matter. This is the aim of the king. I can see it now. I have a feeling that the game of dice will be the cause of a quarrel between the sons of Dhritarashtra and the sons of Pandu. I am eager to have your opinion. Uncle, do you not agree with me?" Vidura said: "That is the cause of my unhappiness. I know that it is not right to play this game of dice. I tried to convince my brother that this is a wrong thing that they are proposing to do. But he would not listen to my words. He sent me to you with this command".

To a certain extent Yudhishthira could guess the consequences of the game of dice. He asked Vidura: "Can you tell me who are all planning to join in the game?" Vidura gave the names: "Sakuni, the evil-minded uncle of Duryodhana and three of the brothers of Duryodhana: Vivimsati, Purumitra and Chitrasena. These are the opponents you may have to face in the game". Yudhishthira said: "The cleverest of the players have been selected. I am weak at the game, and Sakuni is a veritable wizard at throwing the dice. But what can I do? All that happens in this world has been ordained by the Creator. What can we do when Fate has already planned the way in which events must take place? I am helpless. The king knows my principle, that I will never disobey the commands of my elders. This kingdom of mine does not belong to Dhritarashtra, and I am not bound to obey him. If a father behaves as a father towards his son, then the son must obey him. But this my father is not well disposed towards me.

He is not pleased with my good fortune. He is jealous of me. He has invited me to see this sabha of his and says that he wants us to spend a few days with him. I know that he is not interested in the manner in which I am to be entertained. He is not interested in my seeing this new sabha of his. All that he wants is the game of dice. I see it only too clearly. I hate to play the game of dice knowing that it leads to evil. But it is the unwritten law that elders must be obeyed. It is also the rule among kshatriyas that one must play when one is invited to play. He must not refuse. Knowing these things, my uncle has sent for me; he knows that I will not disobey him even if I can afford to. Let Fate have her way. I will accompany you to the hated city, Hastinapura".

Accompanied by Kunti and Draupadi, followed by his brothers, Yudhishthira went to Hastinapura at the behest of the tyrannical king and that of cruel Fate which was prodding him on.

Chapter 11

THE DIE IS CAST

Very soon the Pandavas reached Hastinapura. They were welcomed very cordially by the Kauravas. Excellent arrangements were made for their stay. Their apartments were beautifully furnished and there were many servants to attend on them. After they had saluted the elders and greeted their cousins, the Pandavas went to their apartments and spent a very pleasant and very happy night. They were pleasantly surprised to see the thoughtful way in which the Kauravas had made arrangements for their pleasant stay in Hastinapura. It looked as though, for once, the king was sincere in his desire to have them with him for a few days.

Day dawned: the day which was to become etched in their memories as the most terrible day in their lives. They got up early. Having bathed in perfumed water and dressing themselves with great care, the Pandavas left their apartments. Duryodhana and the rest of them took the Pandavas to Jayantapura to see the new sabha which was the excuse which brought the Pandavas to Hastinapura. They walked through the many halls and corridors for a while, appreciating them for the sake of courtesy. Nor were the Kauravas keen to hear the words of praise. They were indifferent. Their thoughts were all centred on the game of dice.

The hall had been seen. They had finished with that now. They all came back to Hastinapura. Sakuni suggested that they should sit down and play a game of dice. Yudhishthira said that he would rather not play since dice was the cause of so many unpleasant things. It caused friendships to die. It was poison. Sakuni said: "Yudhishthira, you are talking of improbable things. This is, after all, a game which I am suggesting. It is not as though all one's belongings are at stake! I said this game is as good as any other to while away the time". Yudhishthira said: "You do not see my point. I do not believe in winning wealth by cheating. And, after all is said and done, this game is just cheating. A wise man becomes a fool once he lays his hands on the dice. It robs a man of his reasoning power. It is like wine. It destroys the good qualities of a man. Once the fever gets into a man, nothing can cure him. This game is a thing to be avoided like some dread disease. Let us not play the game of dice".

Sakuni sneered at him. He said: "Poor Yudhishthira has just acquired wealth after the great Rajasuya. He does not want to part with it. After all it is new to him. Let him keep it. Yudhishthira, you need not play if you are afraid to accept the challenge". Yudhishthira was hurt by the tone of Sakuni. He said: "I am not afraid, nor am I fond of wealth as you are. You know very well that I cannot refuse to play, once I am challenged. I will certainly play. Fate, I know, is more powerful than all the wisdom of man. I want to know who is to be my opponent and what the wager is to be". Duryodhana said: "I wager whatever precious stones and wealth you wager. My uncle Sakuni will play on my behalf". Yudhishthira said: "That is not the rule at all. I have never before heard of this play by proxy. You must play and you must lay the wager". Sakuni said: "I see nothing wrong with this arrangement. It is evident that you want to avoid playing giving some excuse or other. If you do not want to play, tell us frankly". Yudhishthira could say nothing after that.

The hall filled up slowly. Bheeshma, Drona, Kripa, Vidura, they were all there. The king was there. The game began. THE DIE WAS CAST. Yudhishthira announced his stakes: his jewels, his precious stones and his wealth. The prince Duryodhana said: "I am laying my wealth against yours. Here it is". Sakuni took the dice in his hands. He shook them deftly and threw them on the floor. "Won", said Sakuni. Yudhishthira gave gold coins in thousands, and necklaces studded with precious stones. The same wager was laid by the prince. The die was cast once again. Once again Sakuni's "Won" could be heard by all the people in the hall. Silence reigned there now.

The game went on. The fever was now in the blood of poor Yudhishthira. Game after game was played. Sakuni's "Won" now

became just a monotonous refrain for the dreadful game. It was no longer an exclamation of pleasure. Yudhishthira kept on losing steadily. He lost his jewels, his chariots, his gold, his horses, his wealth, his elephants, his army, his slaves, his treasury, his granary, his vessels: everything was being swallowed up by the demon Sakuni sitting there with his persistent taunting voice announcing "Won". Vidura thought that it was time someone intervened. He told the king: "My lord, you have got to listen to my words even if they are not pleasing to your ears. A sick man will not relish the medicine which the physician prescribes. But take it he must, if he has any desire to get well. You must remember the time when this darling son of yours was born. Evil, dreadful omens could be seen. You asked me why. I told you that your son would be the cause of the destruction of the world. I asked you to kill him in order to save the world. You would not listen to me. Now, at least now, believe me when I say that the time has come when the portents will prove their prophecy to be true. The world will end if the game continues any more. The injustice that is being meted out to the Pandavas will not go unpunished. You will suffer great sorrow in your old age because of the death of your sons; yes, all your sons. Do not ill-treat these great heroes. Avarice is a terrible thing. You are afflicted with that terrible disease, and your son has inherited it from you. Your son has not the strength to fight the Pandavas in open manly war. He is cheating them with the help of this prince among cheaters. Please do not countenance this. It is sure to have terrible results. I beseech you, stop this". He did not get a single word of reply from the king.

There was silence after this. The only music was the music made by the dice as they rolled on the floor, with Sakuni's "Won" keeping time to this. No one spoke. Duryodhana turned his face to Vidura. He came and stood near him. He said: "My dear uncle, you are great in praising the virtues of others in our presence. Ever since my childhood I have been noticing one thing. You have always been partial to the Pandavas. You have never liked me. All the time you have tried to malign me. You are very ungrateful to the hand that feeds you. You are trying to kill the natural affection my father has for me. You say you are our well-wisher. I do not think it is true. In fact, I believe it not to be true. You need not grieve for us. We are all right. You can feel sorry for your favourite nephews who will become beggars in a matter of a few moments, thanks to my real well-wisher, my uncle Sakuni. As for your warnings about the future, there is no one who can change the writing of the Creator who set me on this strange eventful voyage called life. Any good qualities I have, any bad qualities I may have, any action of mine now or in the days to

come, have all been already ordained by Him who set me on this journey. Please do not flatter yourself that by your words to my father or to me you can change the course of destiny. Leave us alone. Please do not talk any more words of this kind to my father". Duryodhana turned away from there and walked towards the platform where the fateful game of dice was being played.

The game was going on. Sakuni with his sinister smile said: "I am afraid you have lost all your earthly belongings, Yudhishthira. You have nothing now. If you have something that you can call yours, you can wager that. I will wager all that the prince has won so far. If you win, you can claim it all back". The madness of the game had made Yudhishthira lose all his sense. He was silent for a moment. Suddenly he made up his mind. He said: "I still have something to offer as my wager. This young, dark and handsome brother of mine, this Nakula, will be my wager". "Won", said Sakuni. Yudhishthira said: "The wise Sahadeva is the next wager. There is no one like him in this world. I do not like the thought of using him as my wager But I have to do it". "Won", said Sakuni. Then Sakuni said: "The sons of Maadri are lost. You have two more brothers. Evidently you do not think they are good enough to be used as wagers. I think you are right. Nakula and Sahadeva are dear to you and so you used them as wagers. But actually we did not consider that the stakes were equal. Still, we could afford to be broad-minded. That is why I allowed you to use them as your 'wealth' against that of the king. Let it pass. We have won. But considering the remaining brothers, I think you are right in thinking that they are not good enough as wagers. I think so too. But you must do something if the game is to continue. Or perhaps you think that they are far superior to the sons of Maadri. That is perhaps the reason for your hesitation". Sakuni waited for Yudhishthira to speak.

Yudhishthira was extremely angry with Sakuni for his words which burned him like fire. He said: "Please do not say such things. Your idea is to cause dissension among us. You can never do that. Here is Arjuna who has no equal in the world. He is my wager". "Won", said Sakuni. "Here is Bheema", said Yudhishthira. "He is the commander of my army. This is Bheema whose strength is greater than that of all of you. Bheema is my next wager". "Won", said Sakuni. "I am the wager now", said Yudhishthira. "Won", said Sakuni. There was a moment of stunned silence. In the midst of that silence, like drops of liquid fire, the slow words trickled out of the leering lips of Sakuni: "You still have Draupadi. You have not lost her yet". Bheema grasped his mace firmly in his hand to throw it at the head of Sakuni.

Arjuna stopped him with his eyes. With his senses completely out of his control, Yudhishthira said: "Draupadi, the favoured queen of the Pandavas, is my wager now". The dice was thrown for the last time. For the last time the hall resounded with the triumphant "Won" of Sakuni. All was lost.

CHAPTER 12

DRAUPADI, A SLAVE

The entire hall was shocked into silence. Vidura sat with his head held by his hands, sighing like a serpent. His face was bent down as though he was asking mother earth forgiveness for this injustice done on her face. Bheeshma and the others were overcome with consternation. Only Dhritarashtra was happy. He kept on asking, "What was won now? And now? And now?" The hall resounded with the jubilant cries of the Kauravas. Duryodhana came to Sakuni and embraced him lovingly. He said: "Indeed, this is the happiest day in my life. And I owe it entirely to you, my dear uncle".

Duryodhana said: "Mine uncle Vidura, Draupadi is now our slave. You must go and bring her here to our presence. Let her be made to enter the apartments meant for servants. She must get familiar with her duties". Vidura got up and said: "Duryodhana, even now it is not too late. Do not go any further. You are like a deer which unthinkingly provokes the tiger. These Pandavas should be considered as terrible snakes which spit poison. Do not rouse them. Draupadi is not your slave. She must not be insulted. Yudhishthira had no right to use her as the wager when he had lost himself. I am sure of that. You do not like my words. You think I am not your well-wisher. But I am. I am warning you against the terrible wrath of the Pandavas. If you do not heed my words you will be destroyed, and all your brothers and your friends along with you. Hell is already preparing herself to receive the host of the Kuru House". His words were unheeded. He wept tears of pain and said: "What can I do? None so blind as he who will not see, and none so deaf as he who refuses to listen. They do not know the fate that is in store for them". Vidura spoke no more.

Duryodhana said: "We have had enough and more of this low-born man who can talk of nothing else". He looked around and his eyes fell on an attendant of the court. He summoned him to his pre-

sence. In the midst of that congregation of wise men, old men, righteous men, Duryodhana said: "Praatikaami, go to the women's apartments and tell that slave Draupadi that she belongs to us now, that we desire her presence in the court, that her lord and master, the Kuru prince, has asked her to appear in the court". Seeing the fear in the eyes of the attendant, he said: "Are you afraid of the wrath of the Pandavas which my dear uncle has described just now? Do you not know that Vidura has never approved of us and our behaviour? Do not be afraid. The Pandavas are now our slaves, all of them".

The servant reached the apartments of the queens. He went to Draupadi and said: "Draupadi, you are now the slave of Duryodhana. In the fever of gambling, your husband Yudhishthira has gambled you away to the Kaurava. You are wanted in the court by your lord and master Duryodhana". Draupadi could not speak a word. She was stunned. She said: "What is this you are saying? What do you mean? Did my husband have nothing else to lay as the wager? Has he lost all his senses? How can he gamble me away like this?" The servant said: "What I am saying is true. The king first lost all his belongings. Then he lost his brothers one by one, then himself, and finally he lost you". Draupadi said: "Go back to the court. Find out from Yudhishthira whether he gambled himself away first or me. Come back to me with his answer". The servant went back and reported all this. He looked at Yudhishthira and said: "She wants to know if Yudhishthira lost himself first or her".

Hearing the words of the servant, Yudhishthira felt as though life were ebbing out of his body. He could not give a reply to the question of Draupadi. Duryodhana became angry and said: "Let the woman come here and ask the question herself". The servant went back to Draupadi and told her about the silence of Yudhishthira and the commands of Duryodhana. He said: "I know that the destruction of the Kauravas has begun. This insult to you will destroy our prince Duryodhana". Draupadi would not give up. She said: "Go back once again to the court. Ask my husband what I should do. I will obey him and no one else". The servant went back to the court and gave the message to Yudhishthira. Poor Yudhishthira bent down his head and said: "Tell her that I want her to come here and ask the elders if the action of her husband was right or wrong". The frightened servant would not go again to the presence of Draupadi. He was afraid of her wrath. Duryodhana looked at him and then at his brother Dussasana. He said: "Dussasana, this servant seems to be afraid. You must now go to her apartments and bring her to the court. What can she do to you? She is our slave now". The younger brother of the prince got up from his seat and strode towards the queens' apartments.

Dussasana entered and stood before Draupadi. He laughed and said: "Come, come! You have been won by our prince now. You need not be afraid of your dear husbands any more. You can come without hesitation to Duryodhana. It is but right that you should turn your lotus eyes to the Kuru monarch". She leaped from her seat as though she had been stung. Dussasana was enjoying himself. He laughed loudly and said: "Do not look so modest. We are, after all, the cousins of your husbands". She looked at him with eyes wild with horror and hurried towards the apartments of Gandhari. Dussasana strode with angry steps towards her. He overtook her and grabbed her long black hair. It was a terrible thing to do. Her hair had been purified by sacred waters during the Rajasuya. He caught her by her hair, not knowing that he was touching a serpent which was sure to kill him. He dragged her towards the court. She looked like a tree shaken by the gale. All her appeals fell on deaf ears. Dussasana said: "You are our slave. You are the slave of Duryodhana who has won you. You have been won by him in a game of dice. Your husband Yudhishthira used you as the wager and lost you. He wants you in the court. He wants you to ask this subtle question to the elders of the court. As for our king, he has commanded me to bring you to the court. I will drag you there if you refuse to come willingly". With her long hair dragged by Dussasana, with her dress all wet with her tears and all awry because of the rough handling of Dussasana, Draupadi entered the sabha.

Chapter 13

DRAUPADI POSES A QUESTION

Draupadi had no more tears to shed. Her eyes were now full of anger. With a voice throbbing with fury and indignation, she said: "In this great assembly I see great people, the elders of this ancient House of the Kurus, reputed, from time immemorial, for the Dharma residing in them. You are all here. You are all present; and yet unrighteousness has reared its head. Can it be possible? Here is a man drunk with power, asking his cruel brother to drag a woman to the court. And you are all looking on! Here is my husband who is the very image of Dharma. You are reputed to be conversant with all the nuances of Dharma. Righteousness has indeed fled from this court where this atrocity is allowed. The righteousness for which the House of the Kurus was

noted, has now overleaped its boundary and she is now flowing away from here. In the presence of all of you, my elders, I asked my husband for a detail of the game. I wanted to know if he lost me first or himself. I was not given a reply. And this man has the audacity to drag me into the court. When people like Bheeshma and Drona are allowing this, there is no such thing as Dharma in this court. I will ask you all once again. My question is very simple. Do you all consider me a slave of this man, or am I free?"

With the corners of her eyes she looked at her husbands. She was now seething with anger. She looked daggers at them as though she would fan their anger to a blaze. Yudhishthira would have been happy if death had visited him then. The loss of his wealth, his kingdom, the loss of all that was once his, did not matter much to him. But the angry eyes of Draupadi burning him with their wrath was worse than treacherous arrows shot by an enemy. He bent his head down.

Draupadi looked at Bheeshma. She said: "You are the home of all wisdom and learning. They say there is none wiser than you. Grandfather, can you tell me if I am a slave?" Bheeshma said: "I am indeed at a loss to give a proper answer to your question. The subtle shades of Dharma are very hard to understand. A man cannot gamble something once he has lost himself and when he has declared that he has been won. According to that, Yudhishthira had no right to lose you. But then there is this to be considered. A man has a right over his wife whether he is free or not. He can call her his property even after he has lost himself. Accordingly, I cannot surely say that you are free. Yudhishthira knew that Sakuni is a pastmaster in the art of throwing the dice. Yet he played with him willingly enough. Though he was being defeated, Yudhishthira continued to play and he used you as the wager. I am not able to answer your question".

Draupadi was furious. She said: "You seem to be giving the impression that my husband played the game willingly. Your dear grandson Duryodhana and his uncle challenged him to play. Yudhishthira was unwilling to play. He said as much to uncle Vidura in Indraprastha. He was made to play, forced to play this deceitful game. Knowing that he is not a skilled player, Sakuni made him play with him, Sakuni who is a veritable wizard in the art of throwing the dice. My husband had absolutely no chance of winning, and you all knew it. Yet you were all looking on. Did you not see the injustice of it? Did you not know that it was an unfair game? You should have stopped it. You are the uncle of the king. Not one of you did anything to stop it, nor did you chide this sinful Duryodhana for what he was doing. Now you tell me that my husband played the game willingly, that he

willingly used me as the wager! When he lost himself and then announced me as the next wager, could you not have interfered and said that it was not right? Please pay attention to my words. I ask a question of this sabha. It is no sabha where there are no elders; they are not elders who do not speak what is righteous; where there is no truth, there is no righteousness; nor is it truth when it is wedded to obstinacy".

Looking at Draupadi whose words were like fire, whose eyes were raining tears, Dussasana laughed loudly and called her names. He said: "You are the slave of Duryodhana. Why do you worry about the subtleties of Dharma? You are a slave. Your Dharma is to please your master, your new master, the great Kaurava monarch, Duryodhana". She looked at him as though she would burn him with her eyes. But she spoke not a word. Bheema, with his form trembling like a leaf, spoke hot angry words to his brother Yudhishthira. He said: "Look at the result of your madness. All the wealth that was ours is gone. You gambled away everything that we had, everything. I did not speak a word. I did not mind it even. You gambled us all away. Even that I bore with patience because you are my guru, my elder, and we are all yours for ever. But, my lord, look at this Draupadi dragged into the hall of sin by that animal! Do you think that I can bear this? I cannot bear this any longer. Sahadeva, bring me fire. I must burn these hands of my brother".

Arjuna was sorry to see the anger of Bheema. He was sorry for his dear elder brother Yudhishthira who stood with his head downcast. He was King till yesterday and today he was a slave of these Kauravas. Arjuna said: "Bheema, what is this action of yours? What has come over you? You have never been so rude to our brother before! You have always treated him with the respect due to a father." Bheema said: "True. I did respect him once. He was different then. But now his arm deserves to be burnt. I will throw him and his burnt arms away from here. Look on this scene. Does not your blood boil? Can you stand this?" Arjuna pacified him saying: "Of course I am angry too. But can you not see that our brother is just as angry? He is burning with an anger against himself: he would burn his arms himself if he could. He is already a broken man. Do not add to his unhappiness by showing your anger against him. The Kauravas have always wanted to see us quarrel. Till now we have been always united as the five lives in the body. If you rebel against our dear brother, their wish will be fulfilled. They are happy enough now. Let us not add to it by quarrelling with our brother". Bheema's anger could not be appeased. But Arjuna made him control it. It was dreadful

to see Bheema trying not to throw his mace at the head of Duryodhana and Dussasana. He was heaving with suppressed fury. But he had to be quiet.

Chapter 14

INSULT HEAPED ON INSULT

Looking at the plight of the Pandavas and Draupadi, the heart of one of the sons of Dhritarashtra was touched. It was Vikarna. He got up and addressed Draupadi: "You are right. There is no righteousness in this hall. We all deserve to be sent to hell for this gross crime. All these righteous men here, Bheeshma, Drona, Dhritarashtra and the other elders did not question the act of Yudhishthira when he offered you as the wager. Even now, why are you all silent? Is there not one among you who has the courage to defy Duryodhana and speak the truth?" No one spoke. Only silence greeted his brave words. He wrung his hands together and said: "Well then, I will say what I feel. Draupadi has not been lost. The Kuru prince has no right to call her his slave since Yudhishthira had no right to use her as his wager. The wise say that there are four dangers which beset the path of kings: the first is hunting, the second is addiction to drink, the third is love of gambling and the fourth is too much love for the company of women. These four threaten to make a man lose his rational thinking. It was even so with Yudhishthira. When the gambling fever was on him, he was not responsible for his actions. He did foolish things. When he was challenged, he thought of Draupadi as his next wager. Even that was suggested by Sakuni, and Yudhishthira just agreed to it. But he had no right to use her as the wager since she is the wife of all the brothers and not just his wife. Our grandfather's arguments do not hold good in this case. Without the consent of his brothers, Yudhishthira played with Draupadi as the wager. She is therefore, not a slave. She has not been lost to the Kaurava monarch. She is free".

Vikarna's words created a sensation. People were surprised by his clear and precise thinking. All of them were convinced now that Draupadi was not a slave. Radheya was furious with Vikarna. He stood up and said: "Vikarna, you are assuming too much wisdom. All the wise ones here, beginning from Bheeshma and Drona and Dhritarashtra, are convinced that Draupadi is a slave. You, in your boyish enthusiasm and your mistaken sense of chivalry, think that they are all wrong and

that you are wiser than all of them. If she is not a slave, and if the husbands think that she is not a slave, do you think that they would have allowed her to be brought to the court? When she sent word through the servant, it was Yudhishthira himself who asked her to come to the court. You say that it is not right to call her a slave. But there is no need to consider Dharma in the case of the Pandavas. They are not righteous. Where have you seen one woman being shared by five men? When such unrighteousness has been practised by these people, I do not think we are wrong in summoning Draupadi to the court of the king. Draupadi is not the modest woman who has never seen the world beyond her apartments. She is a common woman. It will not be embarrassing to her to appear in front of so many men in a court of this kind. You need not be concerned about it. She is a shameless woman. You need not fear that her modesty is outraged by her appearance here. She is a slave just like her lords. Why, they have no right to wear the clothes they are wearing. Dussasana, remove the garments of these five men and also that of Draupadi, and surrender them to their lawful owner, the prince".

Hearing these cruel words of Radheya, the Pandavas removed their upper clothes and laid them all in a heap. They returned to their places. Dussasana took hold of the upper cloth of the outraged queen and began to remove it forcibly. Draupadi was frantic with dismay. She looked at her husbands one by one. She knew that it was useless to appeal to them. They would do nothing to save her from dishonour. She looked this way and that, hoping for support from someone. No one moved. She said: "I have heard that when a great danger threatens us nothing can help us, nothing except complete surrender to the Lord. He will help me". She forgot everything. She gave up all attempts to protect herself from the danger. With her palms folded together like a lotus bud, she stood with her eyes closed. They rained tears and her lips rained the praises of the Lord. "Krishna, Vasudeva, they say that you are the last refuge of the helpless. You are everything to me. You must not be blind to the danger which threatens me. They say you are everywhere, that you are present where your bhakta sings your praises. You must be here. I surrender myself to you. It is up to you to save me". It looked as though she was in a trance. She was immune to the words of her enemies. She was not resisting the outrage that Dussasana was attempting. She stood with her palms folded and with her eyes closed.

Dussasana began to pull her clothes. They came off easily. She was not trying to defend herself. The horrified audience looked on. Then a miracle was seen. Dussasana was pulling at her clothes and they were getting longer. He used both his hands and pulled. Still

the cloth kept on feeding his hands. He could not pull it off completely. The cloth grew: grew like the infinite kindness of God, like the tears of a repentant man, like the gifts of a generous man. It was growing. By the side of Dussasana, whose anger was mounting, could be seen a heap of cloth which was growing in size every moment. All the colours of the rainbow gleamed from that heap of cloth. Dussasana was tired. He could no longer continue the disrobing of this woman. She seemed a witch. Or else, how could this happen? At last, exhausted, he gave up the attempt and sat down, with chagrin writ on his face.

The voice of Bheema broke the spell which had descended on the audience. He wrung his hands, his strong hands, together, and said: "Listen to me, all ye kshatriyas. If I do not kill this sinner Dussasana and drink his blood, let me never see the heavens where my forefathers are. Let me go to the hell that is meant for the worst sinners. I will tear his heart out and drink his blood. I swear it". Dussasana laughed at him. They all laughed at him. Radheya said: "Why are you silent, Dussasana? Take her to the servants' quarters. Let her get acquainted with her new duties". Poor Draupadi was wailing: "I am not a slave". She appealed to each and everyone of the elders. But there was no one to help her. All of them were silent. Everyone was afraid of Duryodhana. All but Vidura. Again and again he said that the words of Vikarna were right and that she was by no means the slave of Duryodhana. But no one paid any attention to his words.

Duryodhana smiled at Draupadi and said: "Stop repeating your question. Stop repeating that you are not a slave. We have heard it often enough. We will leave that aside for the moment. Your five husbands Nakula, Sahadeva, Arjuna, Bheema and Yudhishthira, the image of Dharma, are all here. They have not, so far, made any attempt to answer your question. They have not tried to release you from your slavery. They stood silent even when your honour was at stake. I am waiting for Yudhishthira to speak. Let him say whether you belong to him or to me. We will decide your future after that". He waited with a taunting smile on his lips. The bowed head of Yudhishthira was still bowed. He did not speak a word. Duryodhana laughed and said: "Draupadi, look! Your lords are all silent. I will answer your question. You are free. These five men are not your husbands any more. You are free: free to choose a man from amongst us. You are not born to be a slave. You are meant to be the wife of a ruling monarch. Give up these men who are no longer the favourites of fortune. Choose one of us for your master. Let your husband Yudhishthira announce to the court that he has no right over you any more. You can then choose a husband for yourself".

The words of Duryodhana were like terrible darts. Bheema could not bear them. He said: "I would have killed all of you long ago, if it had not been for the fact that I respect my brother. When he announced that we were slaves of this man, we accepted his words. To us Yudhishthira is more than a god. We belong to him heart and soul and we accept his words as gospel. If it had not been for Yudhishthira, we would never have allowed this outrage to take place. When our brother considers himself won by you, we think that we have been won too, in the game of dice. If it had not been for this, do you think that this sinner could have lived—this Dussasana, this man who had the audacity to touch the hair of our queen and drag her to your court? Do you think he would have lived after that? Look at these arms of mine. Look at their strength. Look at their length. No one, not even Indra, can withstand a hug of these arms. My hands are tied down by the shackles of Dharma, by my respect for my brother, by the restraint placed on me by Arjuna. But for Yudhishthira, I would have crushed the lives out of your bodies." Poor Bheema was gasping with the effort with which he was trying to control himself. His chest was heaving. Sweat poured down his face in little rivulets. His breath came in hot spurts. It was pitiable to see this great hero forced to keep his arms from crushing the lives out of the Kauravas.

Radheya said: "Listen to me, Draupadi. The fact is, you are a slave. A slave has no possessions, and since your husbands are slaves they have no right over you. The sons of Dhritarashtra are now your lords. Go into the harem of the king. Choose from among them a husband who will not use you as the wager in a game of dice. A woman who is a slave has every right to choose a new master". These words of Radheya fell like arrows into the ears of Bheema. He looked at Yudhishthira and said: "I do not blame Radheya for what he is saying. He is just stating the rights of a slave. I do blame you. If you had not been so foolish, do you think these enemies would have had the chance to talk like this?" Sighing as a snake hisses, Bheema had to keep his temper under control.

Duryodhana was pleased with the words of Radheya. He asked Yudhishthira: "Bheema, Nakula, Sahadeva and Arjuna are quiet since they do not want to talk when you are here. I am asking you. Let Draupadi get an answer to her question. Do you consider her a free woman or a slave?" Yudhishthira did not reply. Then the sinful Duryodhana, intoxicated by this new power, the power to be able to hurt others, and prodded by fate, looked at his beloved Radheya with smiling eyes. With a wicked smile lighting his face, he looked at Bheema with taunting eyes. When he was sure that he had caught his attention, Duryodhana displayed his left thigh to Draupadi.

CHAPTER 15

THE TERRIBLE OATHS

Bheema sprang at Duryodhana like a cobra which had been trodden. His eyes red like burning metal, he glared at Duryodhana. He said: "If I do not break that thigh, I will never reach the heavens where my forefathers are. I will break that thigh of Duryodhana with my gada. Or else I will be doomed to live in hell endlessly". Radheya sneered at Bheema. He looked at Dussasana and said: "Dussasana, why do you tarry? Lead this woman to the women's quarters. Duryodhana, you can take her for yourself". Dussasana tried to drag her once again. She appealed to the elders once again, to Bheeshma, to Drona, to Dhritarashtra. But no one spoke. Vidura tried in vain to comfort her. He tried once again to appeal to the hidden nobleness of the king. But it was not of any use.

Bheema spoke once again. He said: "I am going to kill Duryodhana. My brother, Arjuna, is going to kill Radheya. This Sakuni, who is clever at playing the game of dice, will be killed by my brother Sahadeva. I tell you once again. Please listen carefully, all of you. When the war takes place, these things will happen. I will kill Duryodhana with my mace and I will place my foot on his head. I will surely drink the blood from the heart of Dussasana".

Arjuna said: "Bheema, those who are living secure in their homes can never understand the danger that awaits them outside. Your words will come true. I am yet to see someone escape the wrath of Bheema. The earth will drink the blood of these four: Duryodhana, Dussasana, Sakuni and Radheya. There is no doubt about it". Arjuna then took a terrible oath. He said: "I solemnly declare that I will obey the commands of my brother. I will kill this Radheya and all his followers, in the war. I will kill everyone who is foolish enough to support him. I will lead them all to the abode of the lord of death. The mountain Himavan may move from his place. The sun may swerve from his appointed orbit. The moon may lose the coolness that is part of her. But I will not swerve from this dread oath I have taken".

Sahadeva addressed the assembly. He said: "Sakuni, you are a blot on the name of the Gandhaaras. Your dear dice: they are not dice; they are swift sharp arrows that spell your death. I swear that I will kill you and all your kinsmen. I hope you will have the courage to face me in the war like a man. I do not know if you will have the

courage to fight. If you have, I swear that I will kill you. That is certain".

Nakula said: "My brothers have sworn to kill Duryodhana, Dussasana, Radheya and Sakuni. I promise you that I will kill the son of Sakuni. I am going to kill Uluka. They will all die, everyone of them, at the hands of the Pandavas, in a war which is sure to be fought in the near future. I am certain of that".

Flowers rained on the Pandavas as they took the oaths. Arjuna said: "I do not like to postpone the killing of these sinners. I do not want to wait for a war. If it had not been for Yudhishthira, we could have killed them all now". With his eyes red with anger, with the Gandiva in his hand, with his breath coming in angry gasps, Arjuna looked like death himself preparing to destroy the world of sinners. The earth trembled in fear at the wrath of Arjuna. It was even more terrible than that of Bheema. Yudhishthira took the hand of Arjuna with love and gratitude. He said: "Arjuna, do not forget yourself in your anger. Do not lose sight of Dharma in your fury. When I heard the words of Radheya, I wanted to burn him too. But somehow I could not be angry with him. Looking at his feet, I feel all my anger ebbing away. Radheya's feet remind me of the blessed feet of our mother".

Arjuna controlled himself. There was silence in the great hall. Too late in the day, Dhritarashtra realized the seriousness of the situation. Hearing the oaths of the Pandavas, his heart trembled in fear. He said: "Oh my son, in your foolishness you have insulted the pure-souled Draupadi. Your death is now certain". He addressed Draupadi in pacifying tones. "I will grant you any boon you want. Please forgive the behaviour of my son who did not know what he was doing". Draupadi said: "Please grant me this boon. Please release my husband Yudhishthira from this bondage. Please announce that he is not the slave of the sinner". Dhritarashtra did so. He asked her to ask another boon. This time Draupadi released Bheema, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva from their bondage. "Ask another boon of me, my daughter", Dhritarashtra said hoping to pacify her with these boons. Draupadi said: "I do not want to overstep the rules of Dharma. I will not be avaricious. I must not accept more than two boons. My husbands are now free. I am more than satisfied".

Once again, it was Radheya's turn to sneer at the Pandavas. He said: "Fortunately for the Pandavas, Draupadi has become a raft to save them from being drowned. They are indeed fortunate to be saved by a woman". Bheema would have done something to him for these words, but again he was stopped by Yudhishthira. Duryodhana and

Radheya, followed by most of the sons of the king, left the hall in a huff. It was clear that they did not like this release of the Pandavas from bondage. Yudhishthira addressed his uncle: "You have always commanded us and we have always obeyed you. If you will tell us what we are to do now we will do so". Dhritarashtra, in an impulsive frame of mind, said: "I am pleased with you and your humility. You are wise and good. You are noble. You must not remember these things which happened today. The good will look only at the good in others and overlook their faults. Please try to forget the sins committed by Duryodhana. I want you to take back all that you lost in the game today. Please go back to your Khandavaprastha. Go back to the land you have been ruling. I want you to forget today, as you would a bad dream. Please think kindly of my son and go in peace to your home". Yudhishthira listened with bent head. He took leave of all the elders and, ascending his chariot with his brothers and Draupadi, went in the direction of Indraprastha.

Chapter 16

THE GAME TO BE PLAYED AGAIN

Dussasana saw the Pandavas going away. He rushed up to where Duryodhana was seated with Sakuni and Radheya. He said: "Father has returned everything to the Pandavas. They are even now going towards Indraprastha". Duryodhana was naturally furious. He went to his father and said: "What madness is this, father? After all that has happened, how could you do this? The Pandavas, angry like cobras, with poison in their hearts and poison in their eyes, are now more dangerous than they were before. Even before all this, it was because they are more powerful than we are, that we had to think up methods of taking their kingdom. We had succeeded. In that assurance we thought fit to insult them as they had never been insulted before. Now, having kindled their wrath to the utmost, you have given them a chance to wreak their vengeance on us. You must have been mad to do this, father. Even now Arjuna and Bheema with the twins will be caressing their weapons and thinking up ways and means of fulfilling their oaths. Do you think they will be quiet after they reach Indraprastha? Do you think Drupada will stay quiet once he hears about the insult and outrage towards his dear daughter? Do you think the fire-

born Dhrishtadyumna will stay back when he hears about this? This madness of yours has got to be rectified".

Duryodhana pondered for a moment. Then he said: "I will tell you what you should do now. Father, send for them again. Tell them this: 'Let there be just one more game played. The one who wins will rule the entire kingdom. The one who loses must live in the forest for twelve years. He and his brothers must spend the thirteenth year in disguise. If, during the thirteenth year, the year of disguise, their identity is revealed, they must spend twelve years more in the forest'. Call them back, father. If *you* call them they cannot refuse. Yudhishthira will not refuse. When uncle is here it is not difficult to guess how the game is going to end. Their exile to the forest is certain. By the time the thirteen years pass, I would have strengthened my position. They will have no chance of winning back their kingdom".

No one in the court approved of this dastardly plot. The king, as usual, was just a toy in the hands of his son. His mind was once again obsessed by the thought that the wealth of the Pandavas would become his. Gandhari heard this and said: "My son, I wish we had taken the advice of Vidura and destroyed you as soon as you were born. You are the root cause of this terrible injustice. Even now it is not too late. Listen to me. If you repent and desist from further sin, the Pandavas may even forget their oaths and spare you your life. Do not coax your father. He is so easily led". Dhritarashtra said: "I cannot refuse my son anything". He sent a messenger to the Pandavas asking them to return to Hastinapura. The messenger reached them. He told Yudhishthira: "The king, your uncle, wants you to come back to Hastinapura. He wants you to play just another game of dice to decide everything".

Yudhishthira was a fatalist. He said: "The Creator has ordained the actions of every man. Whether he meets with good fortune or bad, is all in the hands of Fate. We are helpless. We cannot decide what we are to do. It has already been decided. I know only one thing now. I will have to play that hated game once again. Knowing well that it is going to rob me of all that I have, I must go and play again" The Pandavas returned to Hastinapura.

CHAPTER 17

THE BANISHMENT OF THE PANDAVAS

It was the same hall. The same dice. The same Sakuni with the same sinister smile. Everything was the same. Only, in the mind of Yudhishthira there was great unhappiness. A lesser man would have expressed his feelings: his anger against the king. But not he; not Yudhishthira. He sat down. Sakuni stipulated the conditions of the wager. He said: "All our fortune depends on this one throw of the dice. The winner will be lord of the entire Kuru land. The loser will have to live in the forest for twelve years. One year more will have to be spent in disguise. No one should be recognized. If, however, the identity is revealed, twelve years more will have to be spent in the forest". Yudhishthira bent his head down in silent agreement. Everyone tried to stop Yudhishthira from playing. But he would not listen. His face was placid like the surface of a lake. Sakuni took the dice in his hands. The hated dice rolled on the floor. "Won", said Sakuni.

The Pandavas prepared themselves for the exile. They dressed themselves in garments made of tree bark and deer skin, as was the custom. Dussasana and the other sons of Dhritarashtra taunted them, specially Bheema. Bheema was furious. Looking at him heaving with fury, Dussasana called him "Cow". The others took up the cry and they all jeered at him. Bheema was now really and truly angry. His wrath burst out like a river flowing out towards the sea. He said: "Just because your crafty uncle won our kingdom for you, you seem to think no end of yourselves. But wait! Wait for the day when the war breaks out. I swear that I am going to kill all the hundred sons of the king. I swear again, to remind all of you, that I will drink the blood of this Dussasana, and when I tear his heart out I will remind him of this moment. I will". Bheema paused for breath. He then said: "Fourteen years more and you will all be killed. Cow, indeed!" Bheema strode like a lion along with his brothers.

Yudhishthira took leave of the elders one by one. No one spoke anything. No one could. Vidura said: "God will protect you and help you to carry out all your oaths. The sons of Dhritarashtra are all doomed. Yudhishthira, you must bide your time. Good times will be here again. As for your mother Kunti, leave her behind. She is not fit to spend years together in the forest. I will take care of her. I will cherish her like my mother. Go in peace. We will meet again".

Yudhishthira was pleased with the concern expressed by Vidura about Kunti. He prostrated before Bheeshma and prepared himself to depart on the great exile.

The city was sunk in gloom. The people watched them as they walked along the broad roads of the city. They saw Draupadi with her eyes red with weeping. Her long hair covered her face and her shoulders. She would not bind up her tresses. Her Bheema would do it for her with his hands red with the blood of Dussasana. There was seen another heart-rending scene: the parting of the brothers from their mother Kunti. She had seen them kings but yesterday. Now she saw them with their forms covered with barks and the skin of the deer, with their jewels all removed; with their heads cast down. She saw them ready to leave her and go away to the forest to live as hermits do. She saw Draupadi. It broke her heart. She took Draupadi in her arms and said: "Please be kind to my sons who are responsible for this state of yours. You are indeed a good woman. If it had not been so, all my sons and the Kauravas too could have been burnt by your angry look. You love your husbands and so they are alive. I bless you. Please wait for the dawn of better days. I leave my favourite child Sahadeva in your hands. Be a mother to him". "So be it", said Draupadi, and took leave of her mother-in-law by taking the dust of her feet. She walked along with the Pandavas, and Kunti followed them at a distance. The sight of her sons was too much for her. She broke out into loud lamentations. Her grief was inconsolable. The Pandavas went further. Vidura led Kunti back home trying to make her bear this pain. The Pandavas walked fast, away from the hated city of Hastinapura.

Dhritarashtra was alone in his chamber. He was afraid to be alone. He sent for Vidura. When he came, he asked him: "Vidura, what is happening? I am afraid. I want to know what the Pandavas said before they went away. I want you to tell me how they left the city. Tell me everything". Vidura said: "All the citizens of Hastinapura wanted to accompany the Pandavas to the forest. Like Sree Rama, when he was departing from Ayodhya, our dear Yudhishthira, with tears in his eyes, remonstrated with them and coaxed them to go back to their homes. I could see the people. They were all wiping their eyes, some with their upper clothes, some with their fore-arms and some with their palms. They tried to follow the Pandavas with their eyes. Even that they could not do because of the tears that blinded them. I saw Yudhishthira walking with his face covered by his upper cloth. I saw Bheema walking, all the time looking at his huge powerful hands. I saw Arjuna scattering sand all the way through as he followed his brother. I saw Sahadeva with his face darkened by

grime. I saw Nakula with his form covered with dust and ashes. I saw the beautiful Draupadi with her long perfumed hair covering her face. She was crying all the time. Following these six, I saw their guru, Dhaumya. He was plucking Kusa grass from the southern corner and he was reciting verses from the sacred Saama veda, verses in praise of Rudra and Yama".

Dhritarashtra asked him if the actions of the Pandavas had any significance. Vidura said: "Of course they have significance. You and your son may forget Dharma. But not Yudhishthira. He is a good man. He knows that the entire city will be burnt to ashes if he looks at it with his angry eyes. So, to save the city from his angry looks, he walks with his face covered up. Bheema looks at his hands as he walks because the thoughts of his revenge on your sons are for ever present in his mind. Arjuna's scattering sand, an unending rain of sand, is just a hint that he is bent on scattering rains of arrows to destroy this entire family. Sahadeva has darkened his face because he does not want it to be seen by anyone. As for Nakula, he is the most handsome of the five. He does not want to be seen by the women of the city with their eyes full of desire. He does not want them to think wrong thoughts. Hence he has disfigured himself with dust and ashes. As for Draupadi with her eyes weeping and her face covered by her unbraided hair, it is just an indication that in another thirteen years the women of your household will present this appearance, everyone of them, when they walk in the streets of Hastinapura to perform the funeral rites for their husbands and sons. Dhaumya's plucking Kusa grass and reciting hymns from Saama in praise of Yama and Rudra show that the funeral rites for the sons of the king Dhritarashtra are imminent. The Pandavas are men of few words but they are men of action. Remember, my brother, they will do all that they have promised to do. The evil omens that are apparent in the high heavens show just one thing: DESTRUCTION." Vidura walked away from the chambers of the king in disgust and anger. Just before he went away the sage Narada appeared there. He said: "In another fourteen years, all the Kauravas will be destroyed. Dhritarashtra, you and your sons will reap the fruits of your injustice, fourteen years from today. Till then you can enjoy the kingdom, your ill-gotten wealth. But please do not forget, even for a moment, that your peace of mind is just a make-believe. Your sons will all be destroyed." Narada went away leaving the king in abject terror of the thoughts of the future.

For several hours after this, the king was sunk in gloom. Sanjaya, his charioteer and confidant, came to him and said: "You have managed to get the entire world for yourself. You now own everything that the sons of Pandu had. Why then do you look so depressed?" The king

told him about the actions of the Pandavas and Vidura's interpretation of them. He told him about the prophecy of Narada and his fears about the future. Sanjaya said: "I am not in the least sorry for you. Your behaviour in the hall was unforgivable. You were worse than even your son. I was watching you. You would not listen to the words of Vidura. You are now reaping the fruits of your sinful actions. You will live a terrible life hereafter, dreading the day when the Pandavas come back and destroy your sons".

From that day the king knew no peace. He spent his days and nights with this worry eating into him all the time. When he turned his back on Dharma on that memorable day, Peace left the heart of Dhritarashtra.

VANA
PARVA

CHAPTER 1

KAMYAKA FOREST

The Pandavas travelled fast. It looked as though the only thought in the mind of Yudhishthira was to get away from Hastinapura as fast as he could. They reached the banks of the river Ganga. There was a little copse called Pramanavata. They spent the rest of the day and the night too in that copse. They had no food. They drank the pure sweet water of the river Ganga: just that and nothing else. With their minds and bodies fatigued to the utmost, these princes and Draupadi spent a painful night under the shades of the trees. So passed the first night of their exile.

Several brahmins had accompanied them in spite of the entreaties of Yudhishthira. They too spent the night with them in Pramanavata. The night passed. In the morning Yudhishthira addressed the brahmins: "We have been sent away to the forest to spend twelve years here. We have to hunt for our food; we have to live on fruits, roots and other things. I will not be able to entertain you as I was wont to in Indraprastha. You will not find it easy to live in the forest. Please go back to the city and leave us to our fate". But the brahmins were adamant. They refused to go back to the city. They would not leave them and go. They were prepared to share all their troubles with the Pandavas. Yudhishthira was very unhappy because he had no means of feeding the brahmins who had followed him. He told his brothers and his guru Dhaumya about it.

Dhaumya suggested that he should pray to the Sun for help. He said: "The Sun is the lord of all the food and all the richness of this earth. If you worship him and pray to him for help, he is sure to favour you". Yudhishthira worshipped the Sun with intense concentration. He took no food nor did he sleep. The Sun was pleased with his prayers and appeared to him in person. He said: "I am pleased with you and your desire to please others which prompted you to perform this penance. I will give you food for these twelve years. I give you this vessel made of copper. Take it with you. It will always be full. As soon as Draupadi begins to serve out of the vessel she will get all the food she wants. It will be infinite in its bounty". Yudhishthira received the vessel with gratitude. He went to Dhaumya and his brothers and said: "I will not be unhappy any more. I am able to entertain the brahmins who are depending on me".

They all set out towards the forest called Kamyaka. In the meantime, in Hastinapura Dhritarashtra spent days of misery. He knew now how unjustly he had treated the Pandavas. He dared not face the consequences of his own actions. He sent for Vidura. He told him about his misgivings and said: "Everyone is looking at me with scorn and loathing. The citizens do not love us nor do the others of the royal household. I am very unhappy. Please console me". Vidura said: "I can suggest only one thing, and I am sure my suggestion will not be liked by you. Still I will say it since you asked me for it. If you really repent for your sins, then you must send for the Pandavas and try to make it up with them. You must return their kingdom to them. Man is, after all, full of sinful thoughts and sinful actions. He is not able to look into the future and decide his present actions accordingly. But now you know what is to happen. And you say that you are sorry for what you have done to your nephews. You must repent. In the fire of repentence even the greatest of sins will be burnt away. It is now in your hands to undo what Sakuni had coaxed you to do. It will bring you lasting fame if you send for the Pandavas and return their kingdom to them. If you do not do so, then prepare yourself to face the death of all your sons. Do not think, even for a moment, that the words of the Pandavas are just words. The Pandavas are men of action. They will do what they have sworn to do. You can still avert the tragedy that is threatening to engulf you. Yudhishthira is a man who can never nurse grievances. Once he knows that you are penitent, he will make his brothers give up their hatred too. You can avert the horrible future thus, and only thus. You must give up your love for your son. This love is not healthy, nor is it good". Dhritarashtra was upset by the words of Vidura. He said: "How can I do it? How can I give up my love for my first-born for the sake of the sons of my brother? Your words do not please me. I asked you to speak words of comfort. But you are bent on hurting me and asking me to do the impossible. I do not want you here. You may stay on or you may leave me. You can please yourself." With these harsh words the king left the chambers leaving Vidura alone. For once Vidura did not try to pacify the king. He decided to leave Hastinapura and join the Pandavas in the forest.

The Pandavas had now left the banks of the Ganga. Crossing the river Dhrishadvati, they reached the river Yamuna. They crossed that and proceeded further, always in the western direction. On the banks of the river Saraswati they saw the forest called Kamyaka. They decided to spend some time there. Vidura met them there. He had left Hastinapura in a single chariot, unattended and unescorted. He saw Yudhishthira in the forest, with his brothers and Draupadi. He was surrounded

by brahmins and the inmates of the forest. Yudhishthira was excited at the sight of Vidura. He spoke to his brothers: "I cannot understand why uncle is coming. Perhaps, according to instructions from Sakuni, our dear uncle Dhritarashtra has asked us to go back to Hastinapura for a further game of dice. Or perhaps uncle Vidura is bringing a challenge for war from Duryodhana. In that case, Bheema, you will be happy and Arjuna's Gandiva too. Let us wait and see what he has come about".

The old man was moved to intense grief at the sight of the Pandavas in the forest. Yudhishthira had to comfort him. Vidura told them about the difference of opinion that had occurred between himself and the king. He repeated the last few words of the king: "You can go and stay where your sympathies are. I do not need your help or advice in ruling the kingdom". "So," said Vidura, "I have come to you". Yudhishthira was touched by the affection the old man had for them. They all spent some time together.

The king, of course, could not live without Vidura who was the one person he loved other than his son. Even though most of the time was spent in listening to scoldings from him, the king was happy in the company of Vidura. He knew him to be the personification of goodness. Goodness has a strange and powerful fascination for those whose nature is neither pure nor good. Dhritarashtra was no exception to this rule. He missed the gentle Vidura by his side. He sent Sanjaya his charioteer to the forest, to bring Vidura back. Sanjaya reached the Kamyaka forest and told Vidura about the condition of the king, how he wanted Vidura to come back to Hastinapura, forgiving the faults of the king. The request was pathetic. Good people cannot be angry for long: at least, not with those whom they love. Vidura loved his brother with all the latter's faults and meanness. He took leave of the Pandavas and returned to his brother at Hastinapura.

CHAPTER 2

THE CURSE OF MAITREYA

The journey of Vidura to the Kamyaka forest, and his return, were watched anxiously by Duryodhana and his followers. They sat together discussing it. Duryodhana said: "Father is more easily swayed by Vidura than even by me. Perhaps Vidura has now convinced him

that the Pandavas should be brought back and the kingdom returned to them. What shall we do now?" Sakuni was amused. He said: "The Pandavas are righteous men. Once they have accepted the condition that they have to spend twelve years in the forest and one in disguise, they will not break their promise. They cannot be coaxed to come back. Their anger, again, is too much to be now pacified by mere gifts. Can you not see that we have killed all the affection that they might have had for us? Your fears are childish". Radheya said: "Somehow, I do not approve of these shady plans of our uncle. Why should we not fight? Let us collect an army and attack them in the forest. We can easily destroy them. We can then rest in peace". Duryodhana welcomed his suggestion. They decided to march on the Pandavas in the forest. Vyaasa arrived just in time to stop them. He told Dhritarashtra: "You have caused enough damage to yourself and your sons. Please do not allow this mad attempt of your wilful son. Anyway, your sons are doomed. The banished princes will nurse their anger for thirteen years and then, when they come back from their exile, the entire world will be destroyed if their kingdom is not returned to them. You are the cause of all this injustice. Try to coax your son to make peace with them. If he will not, let him at least stay quiet for thirteen years. What may happen after that is not hard to guess. But nothing should be done now".

The great sage Maitreya came to the court of the Kurus after the departure of Vyaasa. Hearing that he came from the forest, Dhritarashtra asked him about the welfare of the Pandavas. Maitreya said: "Yes, I saw them. In fact, that is the reason for my coming to you. I am surprised and shocked to hear about the treatment given to the sons of your brother. I heard all about the happenings here. How could it happen? In the presence of Bheeshma and you, how could this have been allowed to happen? You seem to have behaved like robbers. Your reputation is gone". Maitreya summoned Duryodhana to his presence and spoke to him in gentle words. He tried to convince him that his attitude was wrong; that he should show the Pandavas all the affection he was capable of. He added: "Also remember this, young man. They are strong. Think of Bheema and Arjuna. It is not as though you are ignorant of the deaths of Hidimba, Baka and Jarasandha. Bheema has now killed Kirmeera too. Why do you hesitate to make peace with them?"

Duryodhana did not bother to pay any attention to his words. With an insolent smile he sat, pretending to be interested in tracing patterns on the floor with his toe. Once he smote his thigh as though he wanted to show the sage that he did not care for his words. Maitreya was wild with him for his insulting attitude. He said: "Bheema's

oath will come true. I will curse you. You will lose your life when that thigh is broken by Bheema". Dhritarashtra tried to pacify him. Maitreya said: "I have cursed him. If, however, he makes peace with the Pandavas the curse can be considered as withdrawn". He wanted to go away. The king wanted him to stay on and tell him about the killing of Kirmeera. The sage refused. He said: "You are all burning with envy for those unfortunate children. You cannot bear to hear the praises of Bheema. There is Vidura. He has heard about it. Ask him. He will tell you". With these angry words Maitreya went away.

Dhritarashtra wanted to hear about the killing of Kirmeera. Vidura told him that three nights after their departure from Hastinapura, while they were proceeding towards Kamyaka, the Pandavas were accosted in the middle of the night by a powerful Rakshasa. He looked dreadful. Yudhishthira asked him who he was. He said that he was Kirmeera and that he was the brother of Baka. He said: "I live here killing all the animals and human beings who are foolish enough to enter the forest. Who are you?" Yudhishthira told him. As soon as he heard that Bheema was there, Kirmeera said: "The time has come when I can satisfy my desire. I have been wanting to avenge the death of Hidimba and Baka. Baka was my brother and Hidimba was a good friend of mine. Bheema has been the death of these dear people. I can have my revenge. I will kill Bheema". He summoned Bheema to fight with him. Arjuna prepared himself to assist his brother by getting his Gandiva ready. Bheema smiled and said: "Arjuna, there is no need for the Gandiva. It does not need two to crush this worm". As usual with him, Bheema uprooted a tree by his side and began the attack. The fight was terrible. But in the end Bheema put Kirmeera across his knees and killed him by breaking his back. Vidura said: "I heard all about this on my way to the Kamyaka forest where they are now staying". Vidura's recital was over. As Maitreya had said, this story, which indicated the power of Bheema, made the king thoughtful and afraid.

CHAPTER 3

KRISHNA'S OATH

Krishna went to the Kamyaka forest to see the Pandavas. With him went Dhrishtadyumna, Dhrishtaketu the king of the Chedis and the

Kekaya brothers famed the world over for their bravery. With Krishna went all the heroes of the Vrishni House. They were shocked to see the condition of the Pandavas and their queen. They sat round Yudhishthira. Krishna said: "The earth has become thirsty for blood. She will drink the blood of these sinners: Duryodhana, Radheya, Sakuni and Dussasana. We are all here. All the kings of the world are shocked at what has happened. Yudhishthira, why should you live in the forest because they ask you to? It was not a fair game nor was it right on their part to impose this condition on you. Let us, all of us, march against the city Hastinapura. I have brought my army with me. So have these heroes. The entire Bharatavarsha is on your side. We can vanquish the Kauravas easily". Yudhishthira said: "No, Krishna. I have done a wrong thing and this exile is the expiation for it. I have to go through it and, with me, my brothers and my beloved queen. They have to suffer for what I did. I would give anything to recall the past. But I cannot. Fate is inexorable. I have to suffer. The great Vyaasa foretold me about this spell of bad luck, when I was in Indraprastha. I have to refuse your offer, Krishna. Please forgive me". Yudhishthira sat silent.

Krishna was terribly angry with the Kauravas. The anger of Krishna was as terrible as that of Rudra at the time of the destruction of the asuras. Arjuna tried to pacify his dearest friend. Arjuna tried to remove the angry frown from the charming face of Krishna. Krishna said: "Yudhishthira, your life and mine are bound up in each other. You are mine and I am yours. We belong to each other. No one can separate you from me. Those who love you are those who love me. Your enemies are my enemies. I will not rest until I destroy my enemies. They will perish, if not now, later, since you are bent on following the conditions to the letter. But it is all a question of time. I will make this earth wet with the blood of these lusty kshatriyas. I will then perform the coronation of the best of men. This, I swear I will do. Yes, I swear I will do this".

When she saw her dear Krishna and her beloved brother Dhrishtadyumna, the grief of Draupadi became intense. All the sorrow she had suffered on that memorable day, all the insults which had been hurled at her by Radheya, Duryodhana and Dussasana became fresh again. She sobbed as though her heart would break. The anger of Krishna against the Kauravas was such a contrast to the patience of Yudhishthira, that it gave her immense comfort. She looked at Krishna, her eyes full of glistening tears. She said: "Krishna, look at me. I am the favoured queen of the five great Pandavas, reputed to be the greatest heroes in the world. I am the sister of Dhrishtadyumna the fire-born. I am the dear friend of Krishna. And yet this has happened to me. They

insulted me, Krishna. They dragged me to the court and, Krishna, they said I was the slave of those beasts. Krishna, they said such awful things. The old dotards Bheeshma and Dhritarashtra were there, but they did nothing to prevent this outrage. They did nothing and they said nothing. I will tell you about these husbands of mine. What is the use of Bheema killing a hundred rakshasas? What if Arjuna fought with the great Indra himself? What is the use of the conquests of Nakula and Sahadeva? What do I care if Yudhishthira is called the sole monarch of this earth since he has performed the Rajasuya? When my hair, purified by the sacred waters during the Rajasuya, when this my hair was touched by that Dussasana, how could they have stood dumb? Dussasana tried to disrobe me. These men were silent. Can anything be more horrible than that? If it had not been for your infinite kindness, I would have been disrobed completely, and still these husbands of mine would have been silent. Yudhishthira talks glibly about Dharma But is it not the highest Dharma of a husband to protect his wife when she is being insulted? Should they not rescue the wife from a strong man who is getting ready to harass her as no other woman has been harassed before? Even if it had been just any woman, they should have leaped to her rescue, as it is written down in the book of rules. They call themselves kshatriyas and they do not know the meaning of the word. But chivalry is dead in the hearts of men. They are not men".

Draupadi's tears flowed without restraint. She could speak no more. Krishna took her face in his hands. With his fingers he tenderly wiped away her tears, nor were his own eyes dry. He tried to comfort her. He said: "Wait a little longer, Draupadi. Your tears will not be in vain. The women of the Kuru House will weep even as you are weeping now. When Arjuna's arrows quench their thirst in the blood of Radheya, they will weep; when Bheema's hands are red with the blood of Dussasana, they will weep; when that sinful Duryodhana lies on the battle-field with his thighs broken by Bheema, they will weep. I promise to you most solemnly that all these things will happen. Nothing can stop me. Nothing. Listen to my oath. The heavens may fall from their height. The snowy peaks of Himavan may slip and fall. The seas may dry up. The earth may shiver into a million flinders. But the words of Krishna will never be vain empty words. You will see all the Kauravas dead. Do not cry, my dear sister, do not cry".

Draupadi's frenzied sobbing abated slowly after hearing the words of Krishna. He said: "Yudhishthira, if I had been at Dwaraka at the time of the tragedy, I would have heard about it and I would have hurried to Hastinapura uninvited. I would have stopped this game of dice. I would have made Bheeshma and Dhritarashtra take steps to avert this

crime. But I had gone away to Salva. I had to fight with Salva and Saubha. Saubha was a friend of Sisupala. To avenge the death of his friend, he harassed the people in Dwaraka when I was away in Indraprastha. I went to fight with them. After killing them I hurried back to Dwaraka. The omens were all pointing to some calamity. There, in Dwaraka, I heard about the injustice done to you. I came here to see you and talk to you about it. I thought that I would coax you to fight for your kingdom. You have now spent thirteen days in the forest. According to some rule, a day means a year too. So, Yudhishthira, you will not be breaking your promise if you fight now. What do you say?" Yudhishthira smiled at Krishna and said nothing. Krishna smiled too and said: "It will be as you wish. But their end is near. We will see you king very soon. I will place the crown on your head with these my hands. You can be sure of that". Krishna took leave of all of them one by one. Dhrishtadyumna bade farewell to his sister and his brothers-in-law. He embraced his dear friend, Bheema. The Kekaya brothers with Dhrishtaketu took leave of the Pandavas. They all went away, leaving the Pandavas to ponder on their encouraging words and the solemn oath of Krishna.

Chapter 4

DWAITAVANA

After the departure of Krishna and the others, the Pandavas conferred among themselves. Yudhishthira said: "We have to spend twelve years in a forest which is not easily accessible to the people in the city. It must be a place inhabited by good people, the rishis. Where shall we go?" Arjuna said: "You are our guru. You know more about these things than we do. Let us live in a place favoured by you. I have a feeling that the forest called by the name Dwaitavana will suit our purpose admirably. I have seen it during my teerthayatra". Yudhishthira approved of the suggestion. They left the Kamyaka and proceeded towards Dwaitavana. They were there in a very short time. It was a very beautiful and picturesque forest. It looked more like a wild untended garden than a forest. It had tall sturdy trees which pleased the eye. The trees were the homes of nightingales and peacocks.

Yudhishthira went to the rishis in the forest. They welcomed the Pandavas as they would their own children; so dear were they to the good people in the forest. This forest life was comforting to the mind

of Yudhishthira. By nature he was peace-loving. He enjoyed the company of the rishis who had renounced the world. To a mind like that of Yudhishthira who had been hurt and wounded by the behaviour of his uncle and his cousins and even the elders, to a man who was a stranger to the mean qualities which he came across in Hastinapura, the fresh pure air of Dwaitavana with its noble inhabitants was like the clean sweet air of the mountains. Yudhishthira found peace stealing over his soul. Dwaitavana was like a balm to his bruised heart.

When they were in the asrama which they built for themselves, the Pandavas had an illustrious visitor. He was the great Markandeya. He was received with the honour and reverence due to him. He was seated in the asrama with the Pandavas and Draupadi around him. All on a sudden, a smile of strange sweetness lit up the face of the rishi. It was a beautiful sight. The young rishi, who was always sixteen years old as a result of the boon of Sankara, looked even younger with that smile on his face. Yudhishthira was very much intrigued by that smile. He said: "My lord, I am intrigued by your smile. Everyone who has come to see us, so far, has either been sorry to see our plight or angry at the happenings. This is the first time I see someone who looks pleased about something. Will you tell us the reason for your smiling?"

Markandeya was still smiling. He said: "I am not happy, Yudhishthira, to see your plight. On the contrary, I am grieved to see you all like this. But, looking at you with your wife and your brothers, I thought of a very great and noble soul who was even like you. I was reminded of Sree Rama, the son of Dasaratha. Rama was a pure-souled man. Like you, he too walked the forests of Dandaka with his wife Seeta and his brother Lakshmana. He too, at the commands of his father, had to spend fourteen years in the forest. I saw him with his reputed bow, the Kodanda, walking along the slopes of Rishyamooka. He was also like Indra descended to the earth. He was unequalled in valour. His anger was more terrible than death itself. But he strode the forests dressed in tree bark and deer skin, because he would not swerve from Dharma. He would never think in terms of adharma. All the great kings of the past live in the minds of men because of this one thing: their walking in the path of TRUTH. Think of Bhageeratha, of Harischandra. The sun moves in his orbit, and the sea stays within her boundary, because of these great men. Yudhishthira, you made me remember Sree Rama. He ruled the world after his trials were over. Even so will you. You will rule the entire world. I know it. What is more, you will live in the minds of men for ever and ever". Markandeya spent some days with them and took leave of them after he had blessed them. He promised to come again after some days.

The forest looked like the abode of Brahma. The music made by the recital of the Vedas could always be heard there. Peace was to be found in the Dwaitavana. In his own way, Yudhishthira was very happy. He was happy in the company of the rishis. Even in Indraprastha he was happiest when he was listening to discourses on the Vedanta by the many wise and learned men in his court. He found life in Dwaitavana restful after the storm that had broken out but a few days back at Hastinapura. His mind found comfort in the talks of the rishis, talks which made him realize the evanescent nature of worldly possessions. Yudhishthira came to realize the true value of things. He could really and truly feel that the loss of his kingdom was not so terrible after all. One cannot but help thinking, as Markandeya did, of Rama who was also just as happy in the forest. To a truly selfless person, the physical wants are so little. When the soul begins to grow, the bodily desires decrease in direct proportion. Yudhishthira, with his saintliness, was enjoying this life.

But not Draupadi, nor Bheema. These two were very unhappy in Dwaitavana. Bheema's heart was ready to burst with sorrow and anguish. Every time he looked at Draupadi and the state to which she had been brought because of the cruelty of fate and the foolishness of his brother, Bheema would wring his hands together in helpless fury. He would not talk to anyone. He was always to be found alone. He would not sleep, nor would he eat well. Day and night he spent in misery reliving the horrible day in Hastinapura. His eyes would be always red with anger and sleepless nights. The thoughts of his revenge were constantly in his mind and he would suddenly gnash his teeth and throw his mace in the air and say: "Let them wait. Let them just wait. I will kill them, all of them". It was not possible for anyone to pacify Bheema. Arjuna could do nothing about this unhappiness of Bheema. Both his brothers were dear to him. He respected them both and they were both so different. Arjuna spent many unhappy days trying to comfort his brother Bheema and explain to him the reason for Yudhishthira's inaction. If Draupadi co-operated, it would have been easier. But she was just as difficult as Bheema. Yudhishthira was happy in the forest. But the other five were far from happy.

CHAPTER 5

BHEEMA, DRAUPADI AND YUDHISHTHIRA

One day, in the evening, they were all sitting in the front porch of their asrama. Looking at them, Draupadi gave vent to her grief. She said to Yudhishthira: "My lord, it breaks my heart to look at you in these surroundings. When I think of the palace where you lived and now at this place where you are now living, when I think of the soft beds you were used to and now at this bed of straw, how can I help weeping? There, at the palace, you would be surrounded by kings, and you would look like Indra surrounded by the lesser gods. Here I see you surrounded by rishis, looking like a sanyasin yourself. When I think of your arms which would be perfumed by sandal paste prepared by my hands, and look at them now covered by dust and ashes, tears blind my eyes. Think of the soft white silks which you were wont to wear, and look at this rough tree bark you are wearing now. When I look at your brothers, my grief is even more terrible. My lord, look at Bheema. He is sitting under that tree, staring into space. Already his form has become thin because he cannot eat these roots and fruits from the forest. He is not used to them. He looks lost. How can he be happy here? How can I bear to see him when he comes back from the fields nearby collecting grain which grows wild? He is ready to march into that hated city Hastinapura and kill all of them. He is waiting for your permission. Look on this Arjuna, my lord! The brave Pandava, who is equalled by no one in this entire world, is now sitting all alone, tossing pebbles into the lake. He sits like this for hours together, watching the water and the ripples on its surface. Can anything be more pathetic than this? Look there, my lord! Look at the dark handsome sons of Maadri and look at the basket of fruits which they are carrying. Is this a task fit for skilled swordsmen? Is this the future their mother dreamed of when she went to her death so happily on the funeral pyre? Fortunate indeed are your father and mother Maadri who did not live to see this disaster fall on the great Pandava heroes. Heroes indeed! My heart is burning at the sight of this. But you, in spite of this, can smile. You are the most unusual kshatriya I have ever seen. I have been watching you ever since we came here. You do not seem to be worried at all about the trouble that has visited us. My frame burns day and night with anger and humiliation. But you do not seem to be affected at all. A kshatriya, who does not reveal his anger, is no kshatriya at all. You are a great

believer in the virtue called patience. But, my lord, misplaced patience is wrong. You must not show patience now. This is not the time for it. You must not be patient and forgiving towards your enemies. Wrath is the only becoming ornament of a kshatriya. Everything has a proper place and time. The rule of conduct *now* should be wrath, hatred and relentlessness. Both the virtues are necessary, I know, wrath and patience. But you must not make a fetish of this policy of patience. Continual anger is not good for the soul. I admit that. But continual patience is not good either. There should be a happy blending of the two in the mental make-up of every man and especially in that of a kshatriya. Even servants will lose respect for a man who is always patient. Listen to my words, my lord. Please show some spirit. It is obvious that you are happy with these brahmins and rishis around you. You can easily be mistaken for a brahmin who has now reached the stage when attachment means nothing, absolutely nothing. I appeal to you to be more spirited, for the sake of your unhappy brothers, if not for my sake".

Yudhishthira listened to the words of Draupadi. He was very fond of his queen. He was sorry to find her weeping all the time. He hated himself for that one day's madness which had caused so much pain to all of them. For himself he did not mind this injustice very much. He had never been too fond of the things of the earth. But his brothers and wife were different. How could they reach the stage which he had reached, the stage where pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow looked alike? He was really a sanyasin, as Draupadi had said. But he had no right to expect the same of the others. They did not like his inaction. But what could they do? They were bound by the shackles of Dharma. Whatever might happen to tempt them, they must not swerve from the path of Dharma. These thoughts made Yudhishthira feel very sorry for Draupadi. He was a son of Dharma and she was the daughter of fire. How could the two natures be reconciled?

Yudhishthira made her sit near him. He took her trembling hands in his two hands. With his rough upper cloth he wiped her soft eyes. He said: "My dear queen, I see you and I see my brothers. Please do not think that the sight of the five of you does not affect me. Do you think I am so heartless as all that? I feel too the anger that is in your hearts. But the time is wrong. It is inopportune. This is not the time to give way to anger. You are wrong. This *is* the time for patience. Anger is a terrible thing. It blinds the inner eye, the eye of wisdom. It kills the soul. It leads man to commit wrongs. It is not an ornament as you seem to think. We must practise patience. The more difficult it is, the more should be our desire to achieve it. We must go through these thirteen years. I have promised. I can-

not go back on my word because I find it easier to succumb to anger. It is a weakness. We must try to control it. I am afraid my words do not please you. But we must face facts. This is not the time for showing my wrath. You must not be too angry with me for these words".

Draupadi could not be pacified by these words. She was fury personified. She said: "I find that fate is more powerful than anything else in this world. Here I am, trying to make you see the plight of your brothers and your wife, and you talk to me about the greatness of Dharma. Your Dharma, I find, is just sitting with the rishis and listening to their talk on the world that is beyond. You are more happy with them than with your own people. You are prepared to give up everything for the sake of this Dharma of yours. When weighed against it, against this Dharma, we all seem so light. You will give up even Bheema, Arjuna, Sahadeva and Nakula and of course me, if it is a question of Dharma. Your madness for Dharma is even more powerful than your love for us. What is this patience you talk about? I have never known it. It is a stranger to me".

Yudhishthira smiled at her and said: "Patience is a wayward woman. She chooses some people for her dwelling place. You are not favoured by her. I can see that. She seems to think that the only person fit enough for her favours is Yudhishthira. She did not choose Duryodhana. She did not choose any of you. She has chosen me. I am honoured and I cannot disappoint her by proving myself to be unworthy of her choice".

They were silent for a while. Bheema, who had been listening to their talk, now came near. He was as angry as Draupadi was. He said: "Brother, what is the use of talking about Dharma? Look where it has brought us. We have never once swerved from the path of truth. What do we get? We have been made to spend thirteen years like animals. And what about the Kauravas? Did they conquer our kingdom in open fight? Did they challenge us and take our kingdom after they had defeated us? No. They arranged a game of dice. They took advantage of this single weakness in you and used it to serve their purpose. We were tied up like a snake by a charm: your words tied us up. We were forced to be silent. Arjuna with his Gandiva within his reach and I with my two powerful hands; we, I say, had to keep quiet because you would not let us kill those men. Under our very eyes the kingdom was being taken away from you. We could not speak a word since we were afraid to hurt you. We could do nothing when Draupadi was insulted by those beasts! Why? Because of you. You were silent and we had to be silent. And now, see what your devotion to Dharma has done to us! We are now wandering in this forest like

hunted animals. Then the thirteenth year we have to spend like hunted criminals. This is what your Dharma has done to us. And what about this Adharma? That has gained for them a kingdom over which they have no right. It has gained for them wealth they did not earn and peace and comfort they do not deserve. If they had won the kingdom by fair means, then this talk of yours on patience would have been right. But, brother, they have taken it from you by unfair means! They cheated you. A thorn should be removed by another thorn. The unrighteousness on their part can be fought only by unrighteousness on our part too. Does not this Draupadi, this Panchala princess, bring tears to your eyes when you see her dressed in these tree barks? Does it not make your blood boil when you think of what she was and what she is now? Please, brother, please take leave of these brahmins. Please take up your bows and arrows. Please let us march into the city of Hastinapura. We can destroy them. We will now establish Dharma in the Kuru House. It has been absent from there for the last few years. We are five fires and we can burn up the entire household in no time. You must not behave like a man who has lost all interest in worldly things. Please behave like a kshatriya".

Yudhishthira sat silent for a few moments after Bheema had spoken. He said: "Bheema, I do not blame you for what you spoke. I do not blame you for this torrent of words which, like arrows, go right inside and hurt. Yes, Bheema, they hurt abominably. But you are right. I deserve all your criticism and I blame myself for it, since it was I who brought you all to this plight. I knew that I would lose my rational thinking powers when I began to play the game. Sakuni was clever. He knew how to manage the entire affair in such a way that at the end I would find that I had lost everything. Whatever had to happen has happened. I gave away all that was mine to them. I then made slaves of you, my beloved brothers—you who have been so much more dear to me than my very life. As for my losing Draupadi, it is too terrible even to think about it. When you two wound me with your hot words and your reproaches, I am silent because I know that you are both justified. I deserve all that you say. *But*, if you think that your words will make me change my ideas of right and wrong, then you are sadly mistaken. I have promised to stay in the forest for twelve years and I have promised to spend one year in disguise. I mean to follow it. You see, to me truth means more than all the wealth of this earth. At the end of thirteen years, if the sinful Duryodhana refuses to give us our kingdom, then, Bheema, then I will become as angry as you want me to. I know that Duryodhana will never be able to part with the kingdom which he has stolen from us. He will certainly refuse to give it back to us. You can then have your heart's

desire, a fight with the Kauravas. Bheema, you can dance about among the corpses of the Kurus. Arjuna can vent his spleen on Radheya and his kinsmen. Sahadeva can kill Sakuni and Nakula can kill his son. You can all be happy. Draupadi, you can feast your eyes by looking at the dead bodies of all your enemies. As for me, I will also fight with you against them. I will also get angry. I will give vent to the anger and fury which I will consume for thirteen years. No one will be able to believe that it is the same Yudhishthira who stood silent in the court of the Kauravas under the greatest provocation. But, my dearest Bheema, all this will be THIRTEEN YEARS HENCE. Not now. As for the Kauravas, do you think that Dhritarashtra, our dear uncle, will live in peace? No. He and his son have won this kingdom by unfair means. This sin of his will rob him of his peace of mind. Mean-minded Dhritarashtra is even now spending his days and nights dreading the end of these thirteen years. The man who has committed a sin like this, will suffer agonies worse than death. On that memorable day, why did I try to stop you from giving vent to your outraged feelings? It was because of this: one should not do a wrong thing on the impulse of the moment. Bheema, we will get our chance. Then, within the bounds of Dharma, you can do anything you please. But not now. You must listen to my words though they are not pleasing to you. NO ONE CAN MAKE ME SWERVE FROM DHARMA".

CHAPTER 6

ARJUNA'S JOURNEY TO INDRAKILA

Bheema and Draupadi could not speak a word, after the impassioned talk of Yudhishthira. They sat silent. When they were sitting thus there came to them the sage Vyaasa. It must have been a great relief for Yudhishthira to find that their talk would have to come to a close. Bheema and Draupadi, with the others, fell at the feet of Vyaasa with great reverence and waited for him to speak. He said: "I know what is going on in the minds of all of you. Bheema, your brother speaks the truth when he says that the time is not opportune. You are like a child. You are impatient for action. But, my child, you do not know the strength of your opponents. All the great heroes are on their side now. Bhoorisravas and his brother Sala are siding with Duryodhana. I know for a fact that your grandfather Bheeshma and your beloved guru Drona have promised to fight for Duryodhana and

they are prepared to lay down their lives for him. Aswatthama is a good friend of Duryodhana. You know that Radheya is the soul of the king. Duryodhana has a loyal friend in Radheya. All these people are going to side with the Kauravas. The elders, though they are fond of you, are determined to fight for him. I know it.

"Now, Radheya, Drona and Bheeshma are all three of them students of Bhagavan Bhargava. They know all the divine astras. As for you, you are powerful no doubt. But if you attack now, without Dharma to protect you, then you will all be killed by them. Their purpose will be served. Take my advice. When Arjuna was bent on letting Agni consume the Khandava forest he had to fight with Indra, as you all know. Indra was defeated. Pleased with his son's prowess he said: 'I will give you all the astras I possess, when the time comes. I will give them to you when Lord Sankara gives you his Pasupata'. These were the words of Indra. The time has come. Yudhishthira, you must send Arjuna to the north. He must please Sankara with his penance. Sankara will give him his own Pasupata, and Indra will give him all the astras he has in his possession. Indra will take Arjuna to his abode. When Arjuna returns from the penance, you can rest assured that nothing can hurt you in the war which is to be fought a few years hence. Bheema, you can be sure there is to be a war. I know it. Ask Arjuna to prepare himself for the war from now". The words of Vyaasa brought a glow to the eyes of Bheema. The certainty of war in the future made him feel that these years of exile would be bearable. Vyaasa said: "You have stayed long enough in Dwaitavana. Go back to Kamyaka. This place has begun to pall on you. You need a change". With these words Vyaasa went away.

The Pandavas set out towards Kamyaka forest on the banks of the river Saraswati. After spending a few days happily there, Yudhishthira reminded Arjuna of the advice of Vyaasa. He said: "Arjuna, we must prepare ourselves for war, war which is imminent. Vyaasa thinks, as I do, that there will be a war. You are my only hope, Arjuna. I depend on you to win this war. You must vanquish Bheeshma, Drona and Radheya, the three students of the great Bhargava. Go now to the north and please Sankara with your penance". Arjuna was only too happy to prepare for the war.

It was the sixth year of their exile. Arjuna was ready for his journey towards the north. He took leave of his brothers and Draupadi. The parting was very tender. They had to be parted for some time. To live without Arjuna would not be easy for them. When he went on the teerthayatra the circumstances were different. Even then Yudhishthira was unwilling to let him go. This parting from his brother was even harder for Yudhishthira.

CHAPTER 7

PASUPATA

After bidding farewell to his brothers, to Draupadi and to Dhaumya and the rishis of Kamyaka, Arjuna proceeded slowly towards the north. In course of time his speed increased. He crossed the mountain called Gandhamadana. He had seen it during the triumphal tour at the time of the Rajasuya. Arjuna had hoped to see this mountain again. He was very happy to see it. It looked as though an old friend was greeting him.

Arjuna crossed the Himavan and reached the mountain peak which goes by the name Indrakila. He decided to stay there and perform his penance. He saw an ascetic sitting there. This ascetic asked him who he was and why he had come there to the lonely and fearful place. He said: "This place is inaccessible to people. It is meant only for those gentle souls who have renounced the world. You, however, seem to be a warrior. You are wearing an armour, and you have a bow and arrows. This is not the place for your armour and your weapons. This is the place where people subdue themselves and not others. We seek peace here and not war. Please throw these things away and rest in peace". Arjuna was not for renouncing his weapons. The ascetic tried to threaten him. But Arjuna was adamant. The ascetic revealed himself. It was Indra. He asked Arjuna what he wanted. Arjuna fell at his feet and told him about the visit of Vyaasa and his advice. He said: "My lord, I do not want to go to Indraloka, your domain. I do not want the pleasures that are assured for those who have seen you once. I have left my brothers and Draupadi in the forest and I have come in search of only one thing, proficiency in the divine astras. I am able to think of only one thing, the war that is to be fought very soon. We have to prepare ourselves for it. My lord, you once told me that you would give me the astras you have, when the proper time comes. Do you think the time has not come yet? We have got to have our revenge on the sinful Duryodhana. Please help us". Indra took his son's hand in his and said: "Do not grieve, my son. I will give you all the astras. But before that you must see my Lord Sankara in person. You must perform your penance here. You will please him. He will reveal himself to you and give you His Pasupata. I will come to you after that". With these words Indra disappeared.

Arjuna was intent on only one thing: the appearance of Sankara.

He was lost to the world in his concentration. He stayed like that, for how long he knew not. He denied himself even the bare necessaries and was intent on his penance. Sankara knew his heart's dearest wish. He saw that the time had come when Arjuna should be rewarded for his devotion. Sankara assumed the form of a hunter. He had a bow and arrows in his hand. His consort Parvati was with him, dressed up as a huntress. They came to the mountain Indrakila. The forest was silent when they appeared. Just then, a rakshasa by name Mooka, taking the form of a wild boar, took it into his head to attack Arjuna. He charged at Arjuna. Arjuna took up his Gandiva in his hand and said: "You are disturbing me and my penance. You seem to wish to send me to the abode of Yama. Instead, I will send you there". He fixed an arrow to the bow and was getting ready to shoot at the boar. Just at that moment Sankara in the guise of a hunter appeared and said: "Stop. This boar is mine. I have come to kill it. You have no right to kill it. Stop". Arjuna did not pay any attention to the words of the hunter. He released his arrow which lodged at once in the body of the boar. At the same time the hunter too released his arrow which went right into the body of the boar. When the two arrows together pierced the body of the boar, it looked as though two streaks of lightning were descending on the same mountain peak. The boar fell down dead. It assumed the form of a rakshasa and life ebbed slowly out of the wounded body.

Arjuna turned his eyes on the hunter who was accompanied by his woman. The presence of these two made the entire mountain glow with a strange light. Arjuna spoke to him. "Who are you? You seem to have no fear of the wild beasts on the mountain slopes. You have brought your woman also. Do you not know that this place is dangerous for women and for even men? You look like a hunter. You, however, do not seem to know the rules of hunting. This boar was trying to attack me and I aimed my arrow at it with the intention of killing it. You have also sent a shaft into this boar. You have no right to do so. This rakshasa is now cut exactly into two halves like the legacy of a dead father divided by his two sons. You have transgressed the rules of hunting. I am angry with you. I am going to kill you". Arjuna took up his bow and was ready to fight with the hunter.

The hunter smiled a smile of infinite charm. He spoke in a soft voice: "I had already aimed at the boar. He was mine already. He rushed towards you. But he died by my arrow. You are an impertinent young man. You are very conceited. You seem to be too vain about your valour. You cannot kill me as you say. As a matter of fact it is your life that is in great danger of being lost. This boar is mine. The arrow which you have shot into it is mine also. If you

are man enough, if you have courage enough, then rescue this shaft of yours". Still he stood smiling. Arjuna was furious with this wild hunter who had dared to challenge him. He was annoyed because his penance was being disturbed. But he was piqued by the words of the hunter. He was ready to fight the duel to which the hunter had challenged him.

Each stung his opponent with arrows like poisonous snakes. Arjuna enveloped the hunter in a cloak of arrows. With a smiling face the hunter removed the envelope as he would a thin film of fine silk. He was again and again smitten by the sharp arrows of Arjuna. But he looked so unruffled: only his smile was becoming more and more pronounced and more charming. Arjuna was nonplussed. This man would not be hurt by his arrows. He said to himself: "This hunter is very handsome. He looks like a young peak of the mountain Himavan. He seems to be different from the ordinary hunters. Perhaps he is a god from above sporting this disguise. But whoever he may be, he seems to be a tough fighter. It is a pleasure to fight with this man". Arjuna now decided to send an astra instead of the usual arrows. All the arrows he had shot so far just stuck to the body of the hunter without in any way hurting him. Like a mountain against a hail-storm, he stood unmoved by the onslaught.

Arjuna found that his quivers had suddenly become empty. He was surprised at this. It should not have happened. Arjuna grasped his Gandiva and hit the hunter on the forehead. Still he stood unmoved. Arjuna was frantic. He grabbed his sword in his hand and advanced towards the hunter who stood smiling still. With the intention of splitting his head with the sword, Arjuna hurled it at the head of the hunter. The sword was just as ineffectual as his other weapons. Arjuna took up boughs from the trees nearby. He took up stones. In short, he took up anything he could lay his hands on. Still the hunter stood undaunted, with that maddening smile.

Arjuna challenged him to fight a duel with him, a duel with their hands. Both of them hit at each other with their fists like pieces of iron. The hunter hit Arjuna and he returned the blow. The fight was terrible. The hunter was undaunted. Arjuna found him to be too powerful. He was now faint with fatigue. He was furious with the man. He was upset at the thought that an ordinary hunter was getting the better of him. He fought on. But in the end Arjuna became unconscious with weakness. He got up and tried to fight again. But he could not. His body was red with the blood flowing freely from his many wounds.

Arjuna was very unhappy. He prayed in his mind to Lord Sankara.

He made a garland of the wild flowers growing there. He made an image of the Lord out of mud, a linga. He placed the garland on the linga and, closing his eyes, he prayed to Sankara. He prayed for the grace of the Lord. He opened his eyes and found that the garland was not on the linga. He was startled. He turned his eyes on the hunter. He saw the garland of flowers on the head of the hunter. He fell at his feet and tears from the eyes of Arjuna washed the feet of the Lord, Sankara. The Lord smiled the sweet smile and said: "Arjuna, I am very pleased with you. Your valour is great. Your skill is something special. You are unequalled in this world. I have not seen a kshatriya like you. You will be invincible. You are equal to me in your bravery. I am happy to grant you any boon. You will defeat all your enemies in the war".

Arjuna again fell at his feet and craved for pardon. Sankara took him by the hand and raised him up. He asked him what he wanted. Arjuna said: "My lord, I want you to give me your personal weapon, the Pasupata. And, my lord, I want to be granted the privilege of seeing your real form". Sankara said: "Certainly I will give you my Pasupata. I came in the guise of a hunter because I wanted to find out if you are fit enough for it. I am satisfied. You are. You are not only fit enough but good enough for it. In the hands of a bad man it will become a dangerous weapon. It will destroy the entire world. But I have every confidence in you. You will not use it unless it is absolutely necessary". Sankara, with Parvati by his side, revealed his true form to Arjuna. Then he gave the Pasupata to him. He taught him the incantations for sending it and for withdrawing it. Arjuna received it with very great joy and greater humility. The heavens and earth rejoiced. Sankara said: "Your father, Indra, is waiting for you. He has work for you in the heavens". The mountain Indrakila was glowing with the presence of the Lord. Suddenly the glow waned. The Lord had disappeared.

Chapter 8

THE OTHER ASTRAS

Arjuna's mind was in a state of strange exhilaration. He had seen the Lord, Sankara. He could not get over it. He was still under the spell of it. Suddenly he saw a pearly white radiance all around him.

It looked like a thousand opals, corals and pearls, all gleaming softly together. He saw a strange sight. All the gods of the heavens were coming to the peak Indrakila. He saw Varuna, the lord of the oceans, Kubera the lord of the riches, Yama the lord of death and Indra the lord of the heavens. Varuna, Kubera, Indra and Yama were the lords of the four quarters West, North, East and South. They approached him and blessed him.

Yama said: "Arjuna, you have seen the form of Sankara. We are all pleased to reveal ourselves to you now. You will be able to conquer all your enemies in the war. Your fame will live for ever. I am Yama and I am pleased to give you my Astra. With Krishna to help you, you and your brothers will be the lords of the earth". Varuna said: "I am Varuna, lord of the West. I am the lord of the oceans. I have come to see you, pleased with your valour. Receive my astra, the powerful Vaarunastra, which will be of immense help to you in the war which is imminent. Use it with discretion. It is as powerful as the astra of Yama". Kubera said: "I come from the north which is my domain. I am Kubera, the lord of the wealth of the earth and the heavens too. I say that you will win all the wealth of the earth after destroying your enemies. I will give you my astra. You are fit enough to use it". Indra embraced his son and said: "I am feeling very happy. I am so proud of you. You have achieved what no mortal has been able to do so far. There is work for you in my kingdom. Prepare yourself to go to my kingdom. I will send you my chariot. I will give you all my astras". Looking at all the gods of the heavens who had assembled on top of the mountain Indrakila, Arjuna was overcome with a great sense of humility. He could not speak because of the tears that were choking him. He fell at their feet and honoured them as was their due. He said: "I am a humble mortal and you are gods. In your extreme love for the Pandavas, you have favoured me. I have been granted the good fortune of seeing you with these earthly eyes of mine. I do not know how to repay you for this kindness". The gods were pleased with him and his humility. They blessed him and vanished.

Arjuna was still thinking of the wonderful happenings of the day. He felt as though he would never be able to get up. He experienced such an emotional upheaval. He was feeling delightfully weak. Suddenly he saw the chariot of Indra. It was resting on the peak. The charioteer of Indra, by name Matali, came to Arjuna with a smiling face. He said: "You must now come to the heavens. Your father needs you there. You must come at once". Arjuna said: "Yes, I must hurry. It is my great good fortune to see with these earthly eyes the heavens which are reached only after performing yagas like the

Rajasuya and Asvamedha. It is the end and aim of all kshatriyas to reach the abode of Indra after this life on earth. It is for this end that we live in Dharma when we walk the earth. I will come".

CHAPTER 9

URVASI'S WRATH

Arjuna purified himself in the waters of the Ganga whose source was there. He invoked the spirit of the mountain and said: "O great Mandara, I salute you. You are the home of the rishis who have gone beyond the reach of the senses. You are the landing place for those who aspire towards heaven. It is because of your grace that people are able to achieve their ambitions in the spiritual world. O king of mountains, I am now taking leave of you. I have spent very happy days in your shelter. I have feasted my eyes looking at your rivers, your slopes and your dense black forests. You have fed me with the fruits of your trees. You have soothed me with the breeze perfumed by the flowers from your forests. In the rivulets springing from your heart I have found peace. Like a child sleeping peacefully on its mother's lap, I have found comfort in the loving protective care of your slopes. I will remember these happy days on your slopes, with great affection and gratitude. I now prostrate before you and take leave of you. Please bless me". A sigh trembled through the branches of the trees. It looked as though the mountain heard his words. With tears in his eyes Arjuna bade adieu to the great Indrakila which had revealed Sankara to him. He ascended the chariot which his father had sent for him.

They reached Amaravati, the city of Indra. He saw all the heavenly trees he had heard about. They passed the wide beautiful roads and reached the home of Indra. Arjuna alighted from the chariot, helped by Matali, and was led by him to the court of Indra. Indra got down from his throne and taking Arjuna by the hand he led him to the throne and made him sit with him. It seemed as though there were two Indras instead of one. Indra would often touch Arjuna with his hands, he would stroke his head with loving hands. He would smile on him again and again. The two together on the throne looked like the sun and moon together. They were both happy. They were together, father and son.

There was music and dancing. Arjuna saw all the apsaras of his

father's court, Menaka, Rambha, Urvasi and Tilottama. He saw their dancing. He was watching it intently. He heard them sing. He was so thrilled to know that he was actually in the court of Indra.

When Arjuna was watching their dancing and listening to their singing, the favourite apsara of Indra, Urvasi, was smitten with love for dark, handsome Arjuna. This son of Indra looked like another Manmatha. Urvasi lost her heart to him. She spent the night in restlessness. Her mind was fixed on Arjuna. She thought of him as her lover. She thought of him by her side, smiling at her with his eyes full of love for her. He would not let her sleep. Urvasi felt that she had to have him.

The moon was shining bright. It looked like day. Her love was just unbearable. Suddenly she got up from her bed. She walked towards the mansions of Arjuna. Her hair was not even caught up in a ribbon. It was wandering round her shoulders like playful clouds flirting with the moon. She was wearing flowers on her arms and on her neck. Her form was perfect. It was made for love. Her beautiful skin, glowing like molten gold, was now wet with sweat. Her breasts were perfectly shaped. She walked towards the mansion of Arjuna with her wide beautiful hips swinging gracefully. Wearing a very thin mantle which was the colour of clouds, she tempted even the rishis with the beauty of her form.

Urvasi reached her destination. She went to the doorway of the palace. She entered. She announced herself to Arjuna who was in his bed. He got up in a flurry and received her with respect. She stood looking at him with her eyes full of desire. Arjuna was feeling embarrassed. He bent his eyes to the ground. He could not meet her hot eyes. He fell at her feet and said: "You are welcome. I cannot see what I can do to please you. You seem to be in a great hurry. Will you tell me the reason for your visit?" Urvasi smiled at him and said: "Today, in the court of Indra I saw you looking at me. I have never seen anyone like you before. I want you. I could not sleep since thoughts of you have banished sleep from my eyes. You must take me and put an end to my suffering. I am burning with love for you".

Arjuna was feeling shy and nervous. He was shocked by her open avowal of love. He placed his two hands on his two ears. He said: "Let me not hear such words. You are right. I *did* look at you in the court of my father today. But that was because I knew that you were the beloved of the great Pururavas, our ancestor. I have heard about the great romance in his life, how he was smitten with love for you and how you returned that love. So I looked at you, as I would look

at a mother whom I had not seen before. You were more beautiful than I had imagined. That is why I looked at you so long and so intently. You must not think wrongly of me. You are a mother to me. You must not talk like this. In fact, I think it is your motherly love which is making you like me so much. Please do not ask me to think of you in a different manner".

Urvasi smiled at him again. She said: "You do not seem to understand. We apsaras have no age. We are always young. The rules that bind ordinary people do not bind us, or affect us. We are dancers in your father's court. We belong to everyone. You need not think that you are transgressing any moral code by taking me. I am just a dancer. You will not be committing any sin in accepting my love. I love you. You must not disappoint me. You seem to know so much about Dharma. Do you not know that it is the Dharma for a man to please the woman who comes to him asking him to satisfy her desire? You must accept me".

Arjuna was sorely distressed by this predicament. He did not like this at all. His soul shrank with shame even at the thought of it. He said: "Please listen to me. You are beautiful; very beautiful. And you are very unhappy because of me. I realize all that. But to me you are as much my mother as Kunti is. You are as sacred to me as Kunti, Maadri or Sachi devi the queen of Indra. You are the mother of our race: we are proud to be Pauravas. I fall at your feet—you are my mother. Please do not distress me with this request. I cannot think of you differently. I am sorry I cannot. Please forgive me".

Urvasi was mad with anger and frustration. This had never happened to her before. She was furious with Arjuna. Her lips quivered with anger. She looked at Arjuna with her eyes red with wrath. She said: "I thought that you were a man. I thought that you would be chivalrous enough to see the state of my mind. But I see that you are not so. You have insulted me. Accept my curse, if not my love. Since you are so conceited about your manliness, I say that you will lose your manliness. You will become a eunuch. You will spend your days in the midst of women, dancing for their amusement." With her form still heaving with anger, with her eyes raining tears and fire at the same time, Urvasi left his presence. Arjuna was left alone with the dreadful curse.

He was stunned by the calamity which had befallen him. He spent a bad night. In the morning he went to his friend Chitrasena and told him all that had happened during the night of Urvasi's visit. Chitrasena went to Indra and acquainted him of the curse of Urvasi. Indra

sent for Arjuna and comforted him. He said: "You have today achieved what rishis have not been able to do so far. No one, not even I, has been able to resist the beautiful Urvasi. As for her curse, I will ask her to reduce it to one year. For one year you must suffer her curse. But it will serve you. During the thirteenth year of your exile, when you will all have to live in disguise, this curse of Urvasi will be useful". Arjuna was now happy about the curse. It would solve a great problem of his. He spent a very happy time at Amaravati with his father and his friend Chitrasena. Indra gave him all the divine astras he had. Arjuna learnt singing and dancing from Chitrasena the gandharva. He became a pastmaster in all the fine arts. He could play on all the musical instruments. He was an adept at it.

One day, the sage Lomasa came to see Indra. He saw Arjuna sitting on the same throne as Indra. He thought to himself: "This is a kshatriya from the earth. What special yaga has he performed? What has he done to deserve this honour?" Guessing his thoughts, Indra said: "My lord, I can guess the thoughts that are now in your heart. This is not any kshatriya. This is Arjuna. He is my son born of Kunti. He came to me to learn the divine astras from me. You will recognize him if I refresh your memory. You know the great rishis Nara and Narayana. They have both been born on the earth to fulfil a divine purpose. The earth complained to Lord Vishnu that the burden of sin that she was bearing was beyond even her patience. The Lord said that He would descend to the earth Himself and relieve her of her burden. Narayana is born as Krishna of the House of Vrishni: and Nara is my son Arjuna. Very soon there will be a blood-letting on the earth, which will cure her of the poison that has accumulated in her. As for Arjuna's coming to me, I have retained him here because I want him to kill my enemies. They are the Nivatakavachas. My son will do this for me and then proceed to the earth. I want to ask a favour of you. Please go to the earth. In the Kamyaka forest dwells Yudhishthira and Draupadi with the other three Pandavas. They are all missing Arjuna. You must comfort Yudhishthira and tell him that Arjuna has now become master of all the divine astras, that he is the student of Chitrasena now and is a master of all fine arts, that there is now no one to equal him in dancing, music and archery, that he is here with me to help me win the war in the heavens. You must make them forget the unhappiness caused by the parting from Arjuna. Please coax them to go on a teerthayatra. I want you to do this for me".

"Certainly", said Lomasa. He blessed Indra and Arjuna and proceeded towards the earth, to the Kamyaka forest.

Chapter 10

YUDHISHTHIRA'S TEERTHA YATRA

The Pandavas were spending their time with great difficulty. Arjuna was the favourite of all of them. They missed his charming presence and his flashing smile. Yudhishthira was very unhappy. Added to this separation was the incessant talk of Draupadi and Bheema trying to convince him that he was in the wrong, that it was foolish to spend their days in exile, that they could kill the Kauravas if only they were given a chance. The patience of Yudhishthira was sorely tried. But he spent his time in trying to comfort the weeping Draupadi and in trying to convince Bheema about the virtues of patience. It was indeed a trying time for Yudhishthira. He did not have Arjuna either with him. Arjuna would have supported him against the onslaught of Bheema's eloquence.

Bheema was now trying to convince his brother that he ought not to have sent Arjuna to the Himalayas to pray to Sankara. He said: "This is another wrong thing you have done. . Because of your foolishness we had to come to the forest. You do not want us to be kshatriyas. You want us to live the life of sanyasins. You like it and you are trying to make us like it. This life suits brahmins all right, but not us. We are kshatriyas and we are born to fight. Now, as if this is all not enough, you have sent—nay—banished Arjuna, our dear brother, to perform TAPAS. Tapas indeed! Never have I heard of a kshatriya performing tapas until he renounces the world. Why should Arjuna acquire divine astras? It just shows that you have no confidence in his strength or mine. To kill a handful of sinners no tapas is needed. We could have done it in an hour. But no! You would not allow it. You want to do things in this hatefully mild and patient way. One year is almost over now since Arjuna went away. We have become sick of this forest life. Please recall Arjuna from his penance. We will all march into that Hastinapura and kill the whole lot of them. You must do this for us".

Poor Yudhishthira found it so hard to listen to this wild talk of his beloved brother. Of all his brothers Yudhishthira loved Bheema most. His heart was given to Bheema mostly. He loved him too much to become offended by his cruel words. He was trying to talk gently to Bheema. There came to him just at that moment the great sage Brihadaswa. Yudhishthira was grateful to him for coming to him just then. He gave way to his intense grief and self-reproach. He

told the rishi all the events of the past six years. He was inconsolable. He said: "My lord, have you seen or have you heard about anyone more unfortunate than me?" The sage Brihadaswa consoled Yudhishthira. He told him that his dark days would soon be over. He told him the story of Nala, the king of Nishadha: how he too had lost his kingdom in a game of dice. He told him about the many sufferings of Nala and how he got his kingdom back. "It was a game of dice again", said the sage, "which won him back his kingdom". It was an amazing thing to hear. Yudhishthira was surprised at this. Brihadaswa told him how Nala was able to win his kingdom back by a game of dice. Nala had learnt the art of playing the game. This art was called Akshahridaya. The rishi said: "I will teach you Akshahridaya. No one can defeat you in a game of dice". Yudhishthira was thrilled at the thought of acquiring the art. He learnt it. When their gloom had lifted, Brihadaswa left them and went away.

Narada came to Yudhishthira and told him that he should now go on a teerthayatra. Yudhishthira consulted his guru Dhaumya. He was also favourable to the idea. He told them about the different teerthas in the four quarters and said that they should set out as early as possible. While they were discussing about it, Lomasa came to Kamyaka. He came to Yudhishthira and told him about his visit to Indra's abode. He recounted to them his talk with Indra. He gave the message of Indra: "Yudhishthira, your brother Arjuna is now with me. With your permission, I will keep him with me. I need his help. After he has done his work for me, I will send him back to you". Lomasa also told Yudhishthira that he should go on a teerthayatra. He said: "I will accompany you to all the holy places. I am familiar with all of them." Yudhishthira was very happy to hear about Arjuna and his achievements. They spent three more nights in Kamyaka. On the fourth day they set out on a pilgrimage to all the holy places in Bharatavarsha.

They first went to the sacred forest called Naimisa. The river Gomati flows there. They bathed in the holy waters of the river. Their next halt was Prayaga, the holy spot where the golden-yellow waters of the Ganga blend with the midnight blue of the Jamuna. Here the river Saraswati gets lost in the two rivers Ganga and Yamuna. The place is called Triveni Sangama. It was a wonderful sight. They now visited the great Mahanadi. It was considered to be very sacred. They met the sage Agastya. There they spent the four months of the rainy season. Lomasa recounted to them the greatness of Agastya. The Pandavas spent a happy time there. From there they proceeded to the banks of the rivers Nanda and Paramananda, and then to the mountain Hemakuta. Every spot on the journey had its own story

and Lomasa was a good narrator. Time passed pleasantly for all of them.

They now turned their way westwards. They saw Godavari and the southern rivers, Agastyateertha and the Indian Ocean. They saw the rivers along the west coast of Bharatavarsha. Finally they came to Prabhasa. Balarama and Krishna received them with great excitement. The Pandavas spent several days together with the Vrishnis talking about the many incidents that had taken place since they last met. Balarama and Krishna were happy to hear about Arjuna and his happy stay with Indra. It was very hard for Krishna to be without Arjuna. He missed him. All the Vrishnis sat round the Pandavas and talked about the unfortunate happenings of the past few years.

Balarama spoke in impassioned terms. He said: "Krishna, I do not like this at all. Here is Yudhishthira, the prince of the House of Kurus. And we see him with his hair matted and his form dressed in tree bark and deer skin. Here is Draupadi, unrivalled in beauty, and her form too is now covered by this dreadful tree bark. Can you bear to see this? How is it that you are doing nothing about it? How could this happen with all the elders of the Kuru House being present? How could Bheeshma and Drona allow this? It is an eternal stain on the family of Dhritarashtra. To banish these brothers to the forest is something terrible. To banish them to the forest for so many years and to enjoy their kingdom is something I did not expect Duryodhana to do. Krishna, I think it is but right that we should march on them and teach them a lesson. Looking at these twins Sahadeva and Nakula, my blood boils with anger. Look at Bheema! Think of his power and look at his dress fit only for pilgrims and mendicants. It is a shame. I saw Yudhishthira surrounded by all the kings of the earth when I saw him last. He is now surrounded by sanyasins. I am very unhappy to see the plight of the Pandavas. How is it the earth does not split into two when so much of injustice is present on her face? Krishna, Satyaki, come. Let us go and fight with the Kauravas and restore their kingdom to the Pandavas".

Satyaki said: "My lord, the time is not ripe yet. Yudhishthira himself is very particular that the thirteen years should pass before the war begins. We all know Duryodhana too well to imagine that he will return their kingdom to the Pandavas. There is to be a war. It is going to be a terrible war. We will all fight. Who can withstand the combination of the Vrishnis and the Pandavas? Let us wait till Yudhishthira gives us permission". Krishna said: "Brother, Satyaki is right. Yudhishthira is advising patience, not because he is not powerful enough to fight but because he wants to keep his word. TRUTH, to him, is greater than all the wealth in this world. Let us respect his

wishes. The time is not distant when we will all enjoy the war to our hearts' content".

Yudhishthira was very happy to see that there were some who understood his feelings and sentiments. He had been listening to Bheema and Draupadi since ever so long, ever since they came to the forest. He had been so hurt by them and so often that this sympathetic speech from Satyaki supported by that of Krishna brought tears to his eyes. He said: "My lord Balarama's anger has already begun to destroy the Kauravas. It only needs the touch of Krishna and Satyaki to finish the conflagration. I have no fears about the future. I know that Bheema and Draupadi will be happy to see the Kauravas destroyed. I am happy and grateful to you all for the affection you have for us".

After their visit to Prabhasa, the Pandavas continued their journey. They proceeded northwards and reached the banks of the river Saraswati. It was a place sacred to the king Sibi because it was here that the incident of the hawk and the dove took place. They saw the river Ganga now. They reached the mountain Mainaka. This was one of the very sacred mountains. Their next stop was Kailasa. They saw Bindusaras, the source of the river Ganga. They saw the seven streams, three of which flowed towards the west, three towards the east and the seventh which followed Bhageeratha. The Pandavas now saw the mountain Mandara. This Mandara mountain was the dwelling place of Kubera. Yudhishthira invoked the spirit of the mountain and offered his prayers. He prayed to the rivers Ganga and Yamuna. The Pandavas found the place so restful and soothing. Even Bheema forgot his misery and was happy on the slopes of the mountain Mandara.

Chapter 11

TOWARDS HIMAVAN

The Pàndavas decided to ascend the Mandara mountain. They found the task very difficult. Yudhishthira was concerned about the delicate Draupadi. Bheema said that he would carry her. He knew that she would like to meet Arjuna who would come to that mountain when he returned from the abode of Indra. Bheema said: "I will carry her. I will carry all of you when you feel that you cannot walk any more". It was early in the morning. The sun had just appeared, tinting the mountain top with pink and gold. The scene was so wonderful. The air was exhilarating. They were not tired, not at the beginning

of the ascent. But it was fatiguing as the sun climbed higher in the heavens. They went on undaunted and walked towards the peak called Gandhamadana, the peak where the air was made up of all perfumes.

They were all excited at the thought of meeting Arjuna. It was now five years since he had left them and gone away. It was a pathetic sight. Yudhishthira, unused to rough life, was trying with great difficulty to climb the mountain. His heart was filled with just one thought, the thought of Arjuna and the meeting with him. He wanted to see Arjuna who had gone to learn all the astras so that they could win the war. They talked of nothing else. They reached the asrama called Badari where the rishis Nara and Narayana were reputed to have performed their penance. Yudhishthira said: "I cannot go any further. My body is burning as if with fever. My breath comes in gasps. I feel faint". Even as he was saying this, a sudden darkness fell.

The sky was overcast by dense black rain clouds. There was a furious gale blowing in all directions. It was a terribly impressive sight The earth, the mountain and the sky were all enveloped in a mantle of dust. They could not talk to each other. The noise of the gale was deafening. They could not see each other. The sky had become so overcast. The trees were felled by the gale. Trees which had trunks as thick as small mountains fell down, pushed out of the soil. It looked as though the sky were descending on to the mountain. The line, where the mountain peaks ended and the rain clouds began, was invisible. They had to make their way in the midst of the newly fallen trees and small hillocks which were scattered all over the place. Bheema was strong enough to push the trees away from their path and to carry Draupadi too, at the same time. But even he had to admit defeat at the hands of nature. The strength of the elements was too much to combat. Bheema sat down suddenly. So did the rest.

The gale abated in its fury. The rain began to pour. They had never seen rain like that. The water drops were sharper than arrows. The storm was lashing the mountain with its fury. Awed at the sight of Nature's fury and the helplessness of man against the rage of the elements, Yudhishthira sat stunned. He could not talk. He could only look. The rocks became dislodged. The water flowed like some millions of mountain torrents. It looked like the fury of a man who had held his anger in leash for a long time and then suddenly let himself go. Yudhishthira thought that if he were to give way to his anger, it would be somewhat like this. The rivers flowed round the trees and, undermining them, they flowed on. The trees fell suddenly, one by one. It was a magnificent sight. Nothing could equal it in grandeur.

At last, the rain stopped. The sky became clear suddenly. The sun, till now hidden behind black clouds, appeared in all his glory.

The world smiled at the sight of the god of light and life. It seemed to say that all was right once again. The sight cheered the weary pilgrims. They began their ascent once more. They had not gone far, when weakness overcame the delicate princess Draupadi. She fainted with the strain of the journey. Her knees gave way and she collapsed. Nakula ran to her. He raised her and placed her head on his lap. Yudhishthira and the others rushed to her side. Yudhishthira took her head on his lap and tried to revive her. He was overcome with pity for her and anger against himself for he was the cause of her unhappiness. He had water brought, and sprinkled it on her face. They massaged her feet gently, and slowly her colour became natural. She was getting her consciousness back. Nakula and Sahadeva gently stroked her feet with their hands. Her feet had become sore and blistered by the rough walk. Yudhishthira blamed himself for this. He said: "Forgive this sinful husband of yours, Draupadi. When your father asked us who we were, I told him that we were the Pandavas and added: 'Your daughter will be leaving a lake of lotuses only to enter another'. I wince when I think of that. You were given to us by your father with the words: 'With these Pandavas as your husbands you will achieve great happiness'. Draupadi, look at the happiness we have been able to give you. You have known nothing but pain ever since you became the bride of the Pandavas. I am cursing myself as no one else can. You must forgive this erring husband of yours and look on all of us with love and pity".

Draupadi comforted the king and said there was nothing to be done when Fate had decided to make them suffer. Yudhishthira told Bheema: "Draupadi will not be able to walk a step more. Either you or the twins must carry her. Or you must ask Ghatotkacha to come and help us out. He is strong and he is devoted to us. He will come if you want him here. I think that will be the best thing to do. You are also tired. You cannot carry Draupadi all the way". Bheema thought of his son. Quicker than thought, Ghatotkacha appeared before them. Bheema embraced him with affection. Yudhishthira was delighted to see this magnificent nephew of his: from his birth Ghatotkacha had been a favourite of Yudhishthira. Bheema said: "My son, look at your mother Draupadi. She cannot walk. You must carry her up the mountain. Walk slowly so that she may be comfortable". Draupadi was now carried by Ghatotkacha. He had brought his myrmidons with him. They carried the rest of the party. Only Dhaumya and Lomasa walked by themselves. They were travelling very fast now. Soon they could see the top of the great Kailasa mountain.

There they were set down by the rakshasas. It was the land of eternal sunlight. The sun's rays were always hovering over the top

of the mountain. The rishis, who had their dwelling place there, welcomed Yudhishthira and his brothers with Draupadi and Dhaumya and Lomasa. In that asrama, known as Badari, they spent many happy days. They could see from there the source of the Ganga: Bindusaras. They could see the mountain Mainaka. They were very happy there. Yudhishthira felt peace stealing over his soul: peace which he had not found anywhere else.

Chapter 12

BHEEMA AND HANUMAN

Nature had been lavish in her gifts around Badarikasrama. The flowers that bloomed there were not to be found anywhere else. It was a wonderful spot. The scenery could not be described by mere words. No language was adequate to describe the asrama and its surroundings. One day, Draupadi was sitting there looking at the beauty spread out in front of her. Suddenly there was blown towards her a flower. It was beautiful. It had a maddening perfume. She took it into her hands and looked at it for a long time. Bheema came there just then. Draupadi called him near and said: "Look, Bheema. Look at this flower. Smell it. What a wonderful perfume! I like it so much. Bheema, can you get me some more of these flowers?" Bheema was only too happy to do something to please Draupadi. He set out immediately in quest of the flower. He followed the perfume. Like a hound following in the wake of its quarry, Bheema went on and on, pursuing the teasing smell. He did not know how far he had gone. His mind was busy with a thousand thoughts. His feet were proceeding just mechanically. He had gone quite some distance. He realized it suddenly. He blew his conch and went further. The noise of his conch roused all the lions that were sleeping in their dens. Bheema went further on.

In that forest dwelt the great Hanuman. He was sleeping. The noise of Bheema's conch woke him up from a deep sleep. He shook his tail and dashed it against the ground. The noise made resounded among the caves of the mountain. This was heard by Bheema. It sounded like a challenge to him. He hurried in the direction from where the noise came. He found a huge big monkey sitting on an immense slab of stone. Bheema was amazed at the sight. He had never seen a monkey like this before. This monkey was sitting there coolly, blocking his way. Bheema went near him. At the noise made by his

approach, the monkey half opened his eyes. He said: "Young man, why do you make so much noise? Your conch woke me up from my sleep. All the human beings in these parts are kind to animals. You seem to be a stranger to this place. You are not considerate towards the inmates of this place. Where do you come from? Who are you? Beyond this spot this forest is impregnable. In kindness I am telling you this, kindness towards a fellow human being. I am sure you will listen to me. Here are some fruits. Eat them. Rest awhile here and go back to where you come from. You cannot go any further than this. I tell you the truth". Bheema spoke in reply to the strange monkey which could talk like a human being. He said: "May I know who you are? You are not an ordinary monkey. You must be some demigod who has assumed the form of a monkey. As for me, I am the son of Vayu. My mother is Kunti. My name is Bheemasena: Bheema for short. I am one of the Pandavas who are in exile". He told the story of the Pandavas and about Arjuna whom they were to receive in a short while. The monkey smiled at the words of Bheema. He said: "I am in your way. I am not able to move. If you will take my advice you will return the way you came". Bheema felt that his temper would rise soon. He was getting very impatient. He said: "I do not want your advice. I want to go on. I am in a hurry. Move out of my way. If you do not, you will regret it". The monkey said: "As I told you before, I am too old to move. If you insist on proceeding even against my advice, you can do so by leaping across my body"

Bheema was getting disgusted with the whole thing. He frowned and said: "You are elder to me. You are sitting in my way. It is not right to leap over your body. It is disrespectful to an elder. But, if you insist, I will have to leap over you as the great Hanuman did when he had to cross the sea". The monkey said: "Who is this Hanuman you talk about? You seem to have some respect for him. I can see it by the way you pronounce his name. Your voice is so gentle and soft when you mention this Hanuman. Tell me, who is this Hanuman?" The monkey turned his eyes on Bheema. There was a droll look in them which irritated Bheema. He said: "You are a monkey and you do not know who Hanuman is!" He smiled disparagingly at the monkey and said: "Hanuman is the greatest of all monkeys. He is my brother. He is a great scholar. He is famed for his great deeds in the service of Sree Rama. When Rama lost Seeta, his wife, this brother of mine leaped across the sea and carried Rama's message of comfort to Seeta. I am just nothing in front of him, his prowess and his strength. But I am strong enough to fight you if I have to. I have got to go to the heart of this forest. Please make way for me.

If you do not, I am afraid I will have to display my power and hurt you. I will have to kill you though I do not want to".

Hanuman smiled to himself when he saw the impatience of Bheema. He said: "Please do not be angry with me. I tell you I am too old to move. Please take pity on my age. My tail is in your way. If you push it to a side the path will be clear. You can go then". Bheema smiled condescendingly and, with his left hand, he tried to brush the tail aside. He could not do it. The tail refused to move. Surprised at this, he used both his hands to push it aside. He could not. He frowned at this unexpected failure. He tried again and again. But the tail remained where it was. The monkey was sitting still, watching him with a faint smile of amusement in his eyes. Bheema had to admit defeat. He hung down his head in shame.

Bheema went to the presence of the monkey. He prostrated before it and said: "Please forgive me for my harsh words. In my arrogance I overreached the bounds of good behaviour. You are old. I am younger than you. You must overlook the faults of one who is like your child. I am sorry for my rude words. Please forgive me". Bheema's eyes were wet. He continued: "You must tell me who you are. You are a king among monkeys. I want to know you". The monkey smiled at him and said: "I am also anxious to tell you who I am. I am the son of Vayu. My name is Hanuman".

The moment these words left his lips, they were clasped in each others' arms. Tears ran down the faces of both. Again and again Bheema said: "My brother", and fresh tears would spring to his eyes. They spent a long time thus talking to each other. Bheema was thrilled beyond words at the thought that he had met his brother. It was a rare piece of good fortune that had come his way. Hanuman said: "I want to grant you a boon as a mark of appreciation of your strength and in memory of these wonderful moments". Bheema could not ask him anything. He said: "When I know that you are with us there is no doubt about the Kauravas being killed". Hanuman said: "I will sit on the flag-staff of Arjuna's chariot when the war begins. With my shouts of encouragement I will put new life into your army and frighten the enemies. I will always be with you. But now you can proceed on your way. The path is difficult and dangerous. You must be very careful." The brothers embraced each other once again and parted.

With his mind full of this meeting with his brother, Bheema proceeded northwards, still following the trail of the perfume. It was stronger now. He followed the smell with excitement. Suddenly he came upon a river. The surface of the river was covered with thousands of the flowers which Draupadi had wanted. The air was laden with the maddening perfume of the flowers. It was the garden of Kubera.

Rakshasas were guarding it. Bheema walked into the garden. The rakshasas saw the intruder. They approached him and said: "Who are you that dares to enter this garden? This belongs to Kubera and no one is allowed to enter the garden". Bheema was impatient. He said: "I am Bheema, the Pandava. My wife Draupadi found one of these beautiful flowers and she wanted some more of them. So I have come to pluck them for her." The rakshasas would not let him do so. They said: "These flowers belong to the king. No one is allowed to touch them. If you want them, you can go to our king and ask him for permission". Bheema said: "No. Why should I ask permission of your king? Why should I beg? I am a kshatriya. I cannot ask favours of others. These flowers are on the face of the river. The river does not belong to anyone and neither do the flowers that grow on the surface of the river. Of course I will pluck the Saugandhika flowers for my Draupadi. No one can stop me". He walked towards the banks of the river.

The rakshasas attacked him. Bheema was furious. He killed most of them with his hands and his mace. He plucked as many flowers as he could and no one could stop him. Kubera was told about the human being who was entering the river like a wild elephant. Kubera laughed and said: "That must be Bheema. Let him pluck the Saugandhika flowers. Do not fight with him. He is a friend". They came back to the river bank and gave Bheema the message of the king. He was pleased with the affection of Kubera.

In the meantime, Yudhishthira and Draupadi were getting worried about the prolonged absence of Bheema. They set out with Ghatotkacha and went in the direction which Bheema had taken. Ghatotkacha travelled fast and soon they reached the garden of Kubera. There they saw the many rakshasas who had been killed by Bheema. They saw him too, sitting on the river bank, his arms full of the flowers. Yudhishthira hurried to him and embraced him with affection. Kubera came there and received them with great honour. He requested them to spend some days with him. They did. Yudhishthira now wanted to go further north. He was discussing it with Bheema. A voice from the heavens spoke: "You are not to go further than this. You must return to Badari. You will find Arjuna on the earth very soon". According to the command of the voice from above, they retraced their steps to Badari. They lived there happily but very impatiently. They were counting the days that had to pass before they could meet Arjuna.

Chapter 13

THE RETURN OF ARJUNA

As the days passed by, their impatience grew. It seemed as though they could not live another day without seeing Arjuna. The surroundings of the asrama where they lived were very picturesque. It was fortunate for them since they spent most of their time in walking about in the forests. The trees were draped in garments of flowers of a thousand hues. For the first time during their exile Draupadi was happy. She spent hours together looking at the flowers and the trees. Her heart would dance with joy. Looking at her joy Bheema would please her with gifts of rare flowers collected from places which she could not reach. But all the time their hearts were thinking of Arjuna and only Arjuna. It was now five years since they had last seen him. Their impatience was unbearable. Every day and every night looked like a year to them.

They were wandering about the forest as usual. They saw a strange sight. The top of the mountain was lit up by a strange unearthly light. The Pandavas were staring at it. The light seemed to grow and it seemed to come nearer. They saw that it was a chariot. Arjuna was in the chariot. They were stunned for a moment. Arjuna jumped from the chariot and rushed towards them. He fell at the feet of Yudhishthira and Bheema and Dhaumya. He saluted Lomasa and all the other rishis in the asrama. Everyone was too upset and too excited to talk. Draupadi stood still, looking at Arjuna as though she were seeing him for the first time. Even her eyelids would not close. No one talked, and everyone talked. It was a wonderful meeting. They were now five brothers. The void had been filled up. They had Arjuna with them now. The glow of deep contentment could be seen on the face of each one of them.

The Pandavas received Matali with due honour. He took leave of them and Arjuna and returned to Indra. Yudhishthira took Arjuna on his lap. He fondled him as he would a little child. They could not talk much. They were all still too excited. Arjuna gave Draupadi the gifts which Indra had sent her. They were wonderful jewels set with gems. After a while, after the beatings of their hearts had become normal, they all sat surrounding Arjuna. Just then there was a great commotion outside. Indra had come to see Yudhishthira. The Pandavas welcomed him with great honour as he descended from his chariot. He received their homage with a smile. They stood around him wait-

ing for him to speak. He told Yudhishthira that his troubles would soon be over, that he need fear his enemies no longer, that he would rule the world gloriously. He added: "Now that your Arjuna has been restored to you, it is time for you to descend to the plains and go back to your asrama in the Kamyaka forest. I came to thank you personally for sparing Arjuna.. He has pleased me immensely with his valour. He will tell you all about it. I am happy to have seen you all. Just a few years more and your dark days will be over. Go back now to Kamyaka".

After Indra's departure, the Pandavas walked towards the asrama. There, when they were all sitting down round Arjuna, Yudhishthira asked him to tell them about his many adventures. Arjuna was very happy to share it all with them once again. To recount an adventure is thrilling enough. But to talk about it to those who love one, who are interested in one, is wonderful. He told them about the mountain Indrakila and his penance on the slopes of the mountain. He narrated his encounter with the wild boar and the mysterious hunter. It was a thrilling narration. Yudhishthira was so proud of his brother. Bheema just sat there stroking his Arjuna again and again. His eyes were wet with joy that came of this tender reunion with his brother. He had been missing Arjuna so much. The narration went on. Arjuna told them about the visit of the other gods and their gifts to him. Then came the visit to Indra. the Urvasi episode, and then his learning dancing and music from Chitrasena. Arjuna told them about the purpose for which he had been taken to the heavens.

"I was having a happy time there. One day Indra, my father, told me: 'You must do me a service. There are some asuras by name Nivatakavachas. They have been giving me immense trouble. They live in the heart of the ocean. They are invincible as far as we are concerned. I want you to go and fight with them and destroy them'. Indra placed a jewelled crown on my head. He said: 'From now on you will be known by the name Kiriti, because of this crown'. The rishis in his court blessed me. Matali brought the chariot. I left for the fight with the Nivatakavachas. I reached their city after passing many beautiful spots on heaven and earth. The people there thought that Indra had come once again to fight with the Nivatakavachas. They came out of their city when they heard the blasts from my conch. My challenge was taken up by them. The war was on.

"These asuras seemed to be specialists in fighting, with magic to help them. Their maya was too much for me to combat. This was in the beginning. But later I could tackle it. I used the astra called Mohini which was too much for them. I overpowered them all. They had to abandon their maya tactics and fight openly. They were very

good fighters. But I had the divine astras to help me. I aimed the Vajra, the personal weapon of Indra, at these asuras, and they were overcome by that. The Vajra struck like lightning. Their kavachas were shattered to pieces. The Nivatakavachas looked like fallen mountains. So well did I fight that Matali praised me immensely. He said that he had never seen such a fight before.

"After killing the Nivatakavachas, I entered their city. It was very beautiful. There is no other word for it, none to describe the richness, the splendour and the magnificence of the city. I was surprised to see so much beauty. I asked Matali how the city became so rich. Amaravati was not so beautiful. Matali told me that it had been the city of Indra formerly. But it was taken away from him by the Nivatakavachas who had pleased Brahma by their penance. They became invincible. The Devas could not do anything to them, thanks to the boon of Brahma. That was why my father wanted me to go and kill them. I am a mortal and not a deva. We returned to the city of Indra, Amaravati.

"On the way back, we saw a floating city. It was a wonderful sight. Watching my astonishment, Matali said: 'Arjuna, this city is called Hiranyapuri. It is now owned by a woman called Puloma. She has several sons called Kalakeyas. With them she lives in this city. By the boon, again, of Brahma, these asuras also have become immune to death by devas. You have to fight them and destroy them as you did the others'. We proceeded towards the city. I challenged the Kalakeyas to fight with me. They were not used to being challenged. They were so secure. But now they came out. The fight was on once again. I found it very hard to fight with them. But I had the astra called Pasupata. I used it. It destroyed the entire host of the Kalakeyas. We returned to Amaravati. Indra welcomed me with great joy. Matali recounted to him the fight on both occasions and he praised me and my prowess. Indra embraced me and blessed me. I felt so proud of myself. Indra said: 'You have done me a great service by killing these Kalakeyas and the Nivatakavachas. I am very pleased with you. Your brother Yudhishthira is indeed very fortunate in his brothers. With you beside him he need have no worry about the future. The Kauravas are as good as dead'. Indra gave me an armour which is impregnable. I spent a very happy time with him. After some time he told me: 'The time has come when we must part. Your brothers and Draupadi are eager to see you. Years have passed by since they lent you to me. I must now return to Yudhishthira what he was pleased to lend me'. Indra asked Matali to bring his chariot. I took leave of my father and Chitrasena and all the rishis in the court of Indra. I came here with great speed to meet you.

I am now happy. Not all the pleasures of heaven can equal the joy I am now having in meeting you after all these years".

They stayed in the Badari asrama for many more days. The very mountains looked different to them now that Arjuna was there with them. They showed him all their favourite spots. They had a wonderful time there. But they had to think of the future. They decided that the time had come when they should return to the Kamyaka forest. Time had passed very quickly for them. The dreadful number TWELVE had now diminished to TWO. They had spent ten years in exile. Bheema, Nakula, Sahadeva and Arjuna approached their brother Yudhishthira with the suggestion that they should now remember their dear cousin Duryodhana.

Bheema said: "Yes, brother. It is time we remember the terrible oaths we have taken. It is time we think of that sinner Duryodhana. This is the eleventh year of the terrible exile which he has imposed on us. We must finish two years more. The one year when we have to live in disguise looms before me. They must now have forgotten us as they would a bad dream, since we have been away from their neighbourhood for five years. They are living in a fools' paradise. They may even be thinking that you have renounced the world and taken up the role of a rishi on the slopes of the Himavan. It is but right that we should descend from this beautiful Gandhamadana mountain and go back to the Kamyaka forest as Indra told us. We must remind Duryodhana that the Pandavas who had gone to the Himalayas have returned after receiving Arjuna. Our dear uncle would have learnt from his excellent spies about the achievements of Arjuna. It will frighten them if we go back to the plains. Let them not think that you and your brothers have renounced the world and decided to stay in Badari asrama. Our return will tell them that the four brothers of Yudhishthira have not forgotten their oaths. It is hard to think that we have to leave this beautiful spot. We have spent the happiest years of the exile here. It was so unlike an exile. Such is the charm it has exerted on us. Draupadi was very happy here. This is the only place where I saw her smile. But, my lord, we have to go. Three years more, and we will see you lord of the world. Balarama, Satyaki and Krishna are waiting impatiently for the end of these dreadful days. Let us go back to the plains".

Chapter 14

NAHUSHA, THE FALLEN GOD

The Pandavas set out on their journey to the plains. They took leave of everyone in the asrama and its neighbourhood. The parting from the great mountain was the most painful part of it. They looked back again and again at the grand mountain called Gandhamadana. Lomasa went back to Amaravati after wishing them well. Yudhishthira was very sorry to let him go. He had been very happy in his company. He had learnt so much from him. The Pandavas crossed the famous Prasravana mountain. They came to Kailasa. They felt as though they had met an old friend. They reached the asrama of Vrishaparva. They spent some time there. It was very pleasing to stay there.

One day, Bheema had gone out hunting. He was wandering here and there. Suddenly he came upon a big python. It was unbelievably huge. He had never seen the like of it before. Before he could realize that he was in danger, the python grabbed him. The moment it touched his body, Bheema felt all his strength ebbing away. The python wound itself round him and would not let him go. All his immense strength was of no avail against the powerful grip of the python. He was amazed at the strength of this 'worm'. Bheema said: "Who are you? What do you intend to do with me? I am Bheema the Pandava. I am the younger brother of Yudhishthira. I have tackled lions and many tigers and elephants. I have been able to kill them all effortlessly. But you amaze me. What special strength is this of yours, that can defy even me?" The python, holding him firm within its coils, said: "I am hungry. It is just my good luck that you came at the correct moment. As for my identity, it is a long story. I am a great king. Because of a curse I am here on this earth in this form. I am waiting for my release".

The python paused for a moment. Then it continued its story. "The name of king Nahusha must have reached your ears. I am Nahusha. I was drunk with power. In my arrogance I insulted the sage Agastya. He cursed me to stay on this earth in the form of a python. He hurled me down from the heavens and I have been here, since how long I know not. I was penitent. Sage Agastya said: 'You must stay on the earth for a very long time. In course of time King Yudhishthira of the lunar race will be your saviour'. I have lost my old memory. I remember only this. The sage said that this king would

be able to answer all my questions on ethics, that he would come when I have in my coils the strongest man on earth. You are, perhaps, the strongest man on this earth and the brother of Yudhishthira. Perhaps the time of my release has come. Look at my fate. I like you and yet I have to kill you though I do not want to. I have to do it because it is part of my curse".

Bheema was touched by the words of Nahusha. He was sorry for the fallen monarch. He said: "I am not in the least angry with you. I am only sorry I have to die like this. I had hoped to die like a kshatriya and not like a beast. I am not sorry to die, but I am sorry to leave my brothers now, when they need me so. They are almost my hostages. They depend on me to win the war for them, war which is imminent. There is Arjuna, of course. He is my next brother. He is now a pastmaster in all the arts of war. He has obtained all the divine astras from the gods. It is no matter if I die. My brother can still be lord of the world. My Draupadi and my mother will miss me. My brothers who are devoted to me will mourn my death. I am sorry to leave them all and die. I am not afraid of death. But I hate to die before fulfilling my promise to Draupadi, that I would break the thigh of Duryodhana and that I would drink the blood of Dussasana. It is no matter. We cannot defy fate". Bheema was clasped firmly in the coils of Nahusha. He could not move. Nahusha too did not want to kill him. He had to. He was trying to make up his mind to do the distasteful task.

Yudhishthira saw several ill omens. He asked everyone where Bheema was. Draupadi told him that Bheema had gone out hunting. Since a long time had passed Yudhishthira became worried. He set out in search of Bheema. Following his footsteps and seeing the broken shrubs and torn branches he knew the path which Bheema had taken. He went far, and, all on a sudden, he saw Bheema caught in the coils of a tremendous python. Yudhishthira's heart almost stopped beating. He was horrified at the sight. He summoned up his failing courage and approached the two, one caught in the coils of the other. He asked Bheema: "My child, what has happened to you? How did you get caught like this? Could you not extricate yourself?" Bheema told him everything, how his strength was of no avail. Yudhishthira addressed the python: "I do not know who you are. I see only your strength. You can be no ordinary snake. No one has been able to withstand the strength of my brother. I am his elder brother Yudhishthira. Please tell me what food you want. I will bring you anything you like. Only please release my brother. He is very dear to me".

Nahusha replied: "I am Nahusha". Yudhishthira at once prostrated before him. The name of Nahusha, his ancestor, was a famous name.

He was an inmate of the abode of Indra. Nahusha's name was a byword on the earth. He was now a python. Yudhishthira could not believe his ears. Nahusha told him about the curse of Agastya and about his promise that Yudhishthira would release him from the curse. He said: "My only chance of release is now. I have your brother's life in my hands. If you will answer all my questions on ethics, I will release your Bheema and you can release me from the curse".

It was a strange situation. Yudhishthira had to answer questions on ethics when his brother's life was at stake. "So be it", said Yudhishthira. "I will try to answer all your questions as best as I can". He prayed to his father to protect his mind and said, "I am ready to answer your questions". Nahusha asked him very interesting questions. The first was: "What is the definition of a brahmin?"

"A brahmin", said Yudhishthira, "is one who has these qualities: truthfulness, generosity, sympathy, a dislike for cruelty and a capacity to do tapas. This is a brahmin and no one else".

Nahusha: "What is supreme knowledge?"

Yudhishthira: Brahman; in that there is no misery or happiness: both look alike to the one who KNOWS. Hence, when one has attained supreme knowledge, he will never be unhappy".

Nahusha put similar questions on the order of society, on Varnasrama division into four castes, and other important points of behaviour and codes of living. The answers of Yudhishthira were sharp and correct. But one could also see the humility, the extreme humility of the man in the manner in which he framed the answers. Yudhishthira never said, "This is the answer to your question". He said, "In my opinion, this seems to be the most satisfactory answer". One feels that one can borrow a leaf from the book of this king and learn to give opinions in a gentle and tactful manner, never offending the hearer. It was a great art which Yudhishthira had mastered, the art of gentleness, the desire not to hurt anyone, not even with his words.

Nahusha was pleased with this scholar and saint. He said: "You are a great man, greater than all the wise men I have met so far. I am happy to release your brother. He is free from my coils. Having known you, how can I kill your brother?" Yudhishthira was very happy to realize that Bheema was free. He was happy too to have met this wise man. While they had been talking, Yudhishthira had almost forgotten that Bheema's life was at stake. The many questions of the king were so interesting and fascinating that Yudhishthira was enjoying himself thoroughly. Now Yudhishthira wanted to ask many questions of the wise Nahusha, questions which he gladly answered. Time passed too soon for both of them.

There appeared a chariot in the sky. It touched the earth and

came to where they were. King Nahusha cast off his serpent skin and assumed the majestic form that was his before the curse. He ascended the chariot after bidding adieu to the brothers. A few moments and the chariot had gone beyond their sight. The two brothers embraced each other and they returned to the asrama with their minds full of this strange experience.

The Pandavas had spent almost a year in the asrama of Vrishaparvan and on the slopes of Prasravana Hill. They resumed their journey to the plains. They travelled fast. They reached the river Saraswati. They crossed the river and reached Dwaitavana. It was their old dwelling place. It was there that Vyaasa had come to them and asked Yudhishthira to send Arjuna to the north where he could perform tapas and please the lord Sankara. It all seemed so far away now. They had travelled a long distance of time. They had finished eleven years of the exile. Just one year had to be spent in the forest, one year more in disguise, and then they were free of this dreadful exile. They were almost happy. They did not seem to think of any thing else. They were all thinking ot only one thing: WAR, war that was soon to be fought between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Bheema's face was clearing up gradually and the cloud had lifted. He appeared to be more cheerful. So passed the time for the Pandavas.

Chapter 15

TWO YEARS MORE

The rains came. It was a very heavy monsoon. They were so happy and so excited to see the coming of the rainy season. The river Saraswati was full. It was a pleasing sight. After the season had come to an end, the Pandavas left the Dwaitavana and went to the Kamyaka forest.

Krishna heard that the Pandavas had now come to Kamyaka. It was ages since he had seen them. He wanted to see his dear friend Arjuna who had returned from Indra's Amaravati. With his dear wife Satyabhama, Krishna came to Kamyaka to meet the Pandavas. The Pandavas were overjoyed to see Krishna. Before he could descend from the chariot, the Pandavas surrounded him and showed their affection for him in a thousand ways. It was a wonderful event for them every time Krishna came to see them. It was so in Indraprastha and it was so in Kamyaka. He was their lives put together and to him they meant

his very life. Krishna embraced Arjuna again and again. Satyabhama was eagerly received by Draupadi. They were now contented. With Krishna by their side, they did not feel the want of anything.

Krishna told them that everyone was happy about the achievements of Arjuna. He spoke to Draupadi: "Subhadra and her son Abhimanyu are quite well. Abhimanyu is now master of archery. He is more powerful than even his father. Your sons are now with me in Dwaraka. Dhrishtadyumna brought them to me for their education. The six of them now look big and strong. They are the perfect images of their fathers". He told Yudhishthira: "Yudhishthira, eleven years have passed by. Why should you wait for another two years? Our army is ready. Dhrishtadyumna, with his father and his brothers, is ready with his army. The Kekaya brothers are impatient for your permission. Let us all march to Hastinapura and wage war on the sons of Dhritarashtra. They will be taken by surprise if we attack them now. What do you say?" Yudhishthira looked at him and smiled. He said: "Krishna, you know my feelings. I do not intend to swerve from the path of Dharma. I mean to spend the next two years somehow. It will be hard, I know, particularly for my Bheema here. But it cannot be helped. I must do my duty. I cannot accept your suggestion. You must forgive me". Krishna smiled at Bheema and said: "Bheema, let us wait. Just another two years. Then, we can be as angry as we like". The talk then turned to other subjects. Krishna listened to all of them when they recited their many experiences.

The sage Markandeya made his appearance. He was a great favourite of them all since he was a good story-teller. They sat round him and Krishna said: "Please tell us a story, tell us lots of stories. It is a long time since I heard stories. My mother would tell me so many stories when she put me to sleep. I would listen to one story after another, but would not sleep. I am very fond of the stories of the long ago, how the world was created, how everything began to live. I like stories too about great men and women. You know all about everything, my lord. Please tell us stories, lots of them. We like to hear you". Narada too came just then. They all sat and listened as Markandeya told him about many things, stories illustrating the greatness of knowledge, of the power tapas had, about the incarnation of Vishnu as a fish during the time of the great Deluge, of the Lord who was in the form of a little child sleeping on the leaf of the Aswattha, of the characteristics of the different yugas, Krita, Treta, Dwapara and Kali. He told them the story of Dundhumara, of Kuvalaswa, of the sage Aangirasa. He told them about the god of fire and his love for Swaha. He told them about the war in the high heavens and how Kumara the son of Sankara won the war for the devas. The

stories were many, the story-teller had a way with him when he told them and the listeners were eager and humble. Time passed easily for all of them.

Krishna stayed with the Pandavas for several days and went back to Dwaraka.

Duryodhana's days of peace were drawing to a close. He had thought that thirteen years was a long time. But the major part of the exile of the Pandavas was over. It needed only two years to be over. He had to sit up and think out ways and means of lengthening the thirteen years. Once a brahmin came to the court of Dhritarashtra. The king, as usual, asked him about the welfare of the Pandavas. The brahmin spoke for hours about the difficulties they were undergoing, of the strength of Bheema, of Arjuna and his winning the Pasupata from Lord Sankara, of his killing the Kalakeyas and the Nivatakavachas. They heard all that they did not want to hear, from the stupid brahmin. After he went away, the king began to mourn his own sinful actions and the injustice done to the Pandavas. His talk was naturally not pleasing to his son. Duryodhana, Radheya and Sakuni tried to convince the king that they were more powerful than the Pandavas.

The four of them, Duryodhana, Dussasana, Sakuni and Radheya thought out a way of hurting the Pandavas. Radheya, always desirous of pleasing his friend, said: "My friend, you are now lord of the world. Your enemies are now wandering about the forest like wild beasts. I have an idea. You can hurt them if you follow it. There is nothing in this world more aggravating than to see the riches and glory of one's enemy. It is greater than the loss of wealth and kingdom. Let us all go to the Kamyaka forest and stay there for a few days. Let us make it a pleasure trip. We will go with all our women and all our attendants. Seeing your splendour, the Pandavas will burn with anger and jealousy. Looking at your wives, Draupadi will be livid with envy. Let us go to Kamyaka". Duryodhana approved of the suggestion of Radheya. He said: "You are very dear to me, Radheya. You speak words which are always pleasing to my ears. I have heard of the difficulties which the Pandavas are going through. I would like to see it with my eyes. I want to see Bheema and Arjuna dressed in tree barks. I want to see that woman who laughed at me in Indraprastha. I want to see Draupadi with her pride gone, with her eyes weeping tears. I think your idea is excellent. Now think up sufficient reasons for this expedition of ours to the forest".

Radheya spent a night thinking up a reason. The next morning he went to Duryodhana and said: "I can tell you what we ought to do. Our cattle station is in the neighbourhood of Dwaitavana. Let us go

there on the pretext of inspecting the cows. The king will see no reason why we should not go. If we get his permission in the council, we can tell him the real reason later. We can realize our heart's desire". Sakuni, as usual, approved of the plan with enthusiasm. They laughed together and, after shaking each other's hands, they walked towards the king's court with the innocuous idea of the Ghoshayatra. The king was in the court. They got his permission. Later they told him the real reason. He did not like it. He thought it was too risky. He said: "The Pandavas are there close by in the Kamyaka forest. Yudhishthira is very angry with you. There is Draupadi. The Pandavas may attack you and wreak their vengeance on you. You have heard of Arjuna's increased power. Your action is foolish. I do not like it. Do not go there". Sakuni laughed at his fears. He said: "You know that Yudhishthira is righteous. His brothers are also righteous. They will not harm us." Unwillingly the king let them go.

Chapter 16

DURYODHANA'S GHOSHAYATRA

The Kauravas went to Dwaitavana. Radheya, Sakuni, Dussasana and Duryodhana were the foremost among them. They were extremely happy and so very enthusiastic. They were followed by a large and impressive retinue. Their wives and attendants accompanied them. They reached a beautiful lake in Dwaitavana. They camped there. Then began the inspection of the cows. It was over soon. The king, Duryodhana, distributed gifts and riches to the cowherds. They now began to hunt in the forest. They were bent on enjoying themselves. They had heard that the Pandavas had left the Kamyaka and had come to Dwaitavana. The spies of Duryodhana found out this piece of information for him. He at once decided to go to the lake for a swim since the Pandavas were in the neighbourhood of the lake. Duryodhana went to the lake with all his women.

The lake had already been occupied by a gandharva who had come there with his retinue. The servants of Duryodhana went to him and reported that the lake had already been occupied by a gandharva. Duryodhana was quite annoyed. He sent word to the gandharva that the Kaurava monarch had come there with his queens and so the lake had to be vacated. The servants carried the commands to the gandharva. He attached no importance whatever to the commands. He laughed

and said: "Tell that foolish king of yours that I am not bound to obey him. He seems to think that the denizens of heaven will obey his orders. As for you, go away from here soon if you value your lives. You can go and tell your king what happened here".

Duryodhana was very angry when he heard about the insolence of the gandharva. He collected all his troops and went towards the lake. When the gandharva heard that the Kaurava monarch was marching towards the lake with the intention of fighting with him, he gave orders to his soldiers to fight back. The army of Duryodhana was frightened by the strength of the gandharvas. But Radheya was undaunted. He rallied the ranks and fought with the gandharvas. The army of Duryodhana was now in danger of being defeated. Duryodhana, Sakuni, and Dussasana with the rest of the crowd now joined Radheya and fought with the army of gandharvas. Seeing his army being defeated by Radheya and the others, the gandharva chief joined in the fight. He fought fiercely. The Kaurava army could not stand the onslaught. But Radheya fought still. Duryodhana and the others too fought very well. But they soon found the gandharva to be too strong for them. Radheya could not fight any more. He had to leap from the chariot and run away, to his eternal shame. At the sight of this, there was panic in the Kaurava army. Duryodhana, however, fought on. He did not turn his back on the enemy. He was made to lose his chariot. He stood on the ground and continued to fight. But he was soon overpowered by the gandharva. He lifted Duryodhana by the hair, tied his arms behind him with ropes and carried him away in his chariot. Dussasana and his brothers too were tied up and carried away. The women also were being taken away by the gandharva.

There was panic in the retinue of Duryodhana. In despair, the remaining people came to the asrama of Yudhishthira and said: "The sons of Dhritarashtra and their women are all being taken away by a gandharva. You must please pursue him and rescue our king". Hearing these words Bheema said: "Good. I am glad to hear about this. Punishment has overtaken them for what they did. They harassed us. There is someone else to do to them what we should have done long ago. There are, then, some brave persons left in this world who have the courage to take the law into their own hands and punish the wicked. That man came here with his henchmen to feast his eyes on us, looking at us roaming in the forest. He wanted to laugh at us. People who wish evil to others will themselves be overcome by evil. I am very happy to hear this piece of news".

Yudhishthira did not like the way Bheema was gloating over the fate of Duryodhana. He said: "Bheema, I do not approve of your words. These servants of our cousin are asking us to help them. We

are cousins, and among cousins there will be misunderstandings. But the fact remains that they are our cousins. They *are* our cousins. They are our enemies: granted. But still they are our blood brothers. Between ourselves we may not be friends. But against a third person we must be united. *We are five against a hundred. But against a common enemy we are a hundred and five.* I agree with you that they have been the cause of our unhappiness all these years. They are sinners. They came here just to flaunt their riches in our face. I know it. But, my dear Bheema, you must see that they appeal to us for help. Women and other innocent people are being harassed. The reputation of our family is at stake. Get ready to fight now. Take Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva with you. Go immediately".

Bheema was furious. His eyes became red with anger. He said: "What is this you are trying to do, my brother? Even if *you* can so easily forget all that they have done to us, *I* cannot. They are suffering for their sins. This is a thing we should have done long ago. Now somebody else is doing it for us. I consider this gandharva to be a well-wisher to us. He is now our friend. Please do not ask us to go and rescue those hateful cousins from a fate they richly deserve". From the distance came the voices of Duryodhana and the others calling out for help. The gentle Yudhishthira, the noble-minded Yudhishthira, could not contain himself. He looked angrily at his brother and said: "Are you not ashamed of yourself? You are just allowing somebody else to do what you have sworn to do. You have got to hurry up and release Duryodhana. They have come to us for help. It hardly behoves any of us to talk about all that they have done to us. Whether they deserve this fate or not, is not for you or me to say. Do you not know that the first duty of a kshatriya is to protect the oppressed? Is that not the meaning of the word? You must not take your revenge on Duryodhana through the services of a third man. Rescue him first, Bheema. Then, when the time comes, you must yourself do what you have been longing to do. If you do not go immediately with Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva, I will go. I will not allow this to happen to our cousins and their innocent women. They are in the wrong, I am sure. But that is beside the point. We must do our duty. Are you ready to go? Or shall I get ready?"

Hearing this impassioned speech of his brother, Bheema was subdued. He saw what Yudhishthira meant. Bheema was ashamed of his words: "Someone else is doing what we ought to have done". He said: "Brother, I promise to go immediately and release Duryodhana". Arjuna joined him and said: "I will see that the gandharva releases Duryodhana. If he does not, then the earth will drink the blood of all the gandharvas". Four of them set out in the direction in which the

Kauravas had been carried away. They saw the soldiers who were going with their prisoners. The Pandavas accosted them and asked them gently to release the prisoners. They would not listen to reason. They said that they had been commanded by their master to bring the prisoners. They had to obey. Arjuna said: "Since you do not seem to listen to reason, I will have to give up being gentle with you. I have no other choice. I will have to fight with you all". All four of them began to shoot sharp arrows at the army of gandharvas.

The fight was intense. The gandharvas were fighters of no mean order. As for the Pandavas, Yudhishthira's words had made them realize their immediate duty: to release the innocent women of the retinue of Duryodhana and him too, incidentally. They wanted him to be free now so that they could fight him themselves later on. Yudhishthira had cleverly touched them on a raw spot, their personal vendetta. When he saw the condition of his army, the gandharva chief came to the front and began to fight. He fought from the sky. He hurled Gadas and arrows from above. But Arjuna could tackle this kind of fighting easily. The gandharva came down and revealed himself. Arjuna was taken aback when he saw who he was. It was not just some gandharva. It was someone whom he knew well. They had been together so often. The gandharva was Chitrasena, the dear friend and guru of Arjuna. He had taught him his dancing and music when Arjuna was in the court of Indra. On seeing him, Arjuna threw his bow down and rushed to him. The two friends embraced each other with affection.

The five of them sat together and spent some time talking about the events which had taken place since they last met. Arjuna smiled at Chitrasena and said: "What has come over you, my friend? Why did you thus capture our Duryodhana and his retinue?" Chitrasena said: "It is a long story. Listen to me carefully. Your Duryodhana, as you so affectionately call him, came to Dwaitavana, not to inspect the cows, but to see you suffer. They came to see the gentle Yudhishthira in the forest, dressed in barks and deer skin. They came to see Bheema thin and sick with forest life, with his powerful form dressed in rags. They came to see the beautiful sons of Maadri looking like ascetics, with their glowing handsomeness completely eclipsed by their dress. They came to see Draupadi suffer, so that they could laugh at her. They came to see you, Arjuna, suffering, they thought, extreme unhappiness since you have just returned from your father's abode. Your father, Indra, knew their intentions. He told me: 'Go down to the earth. Pick up a quarrel with that man Duryodhana. Capture him. Arjuna and his brothers will be sent by Yudhishthira to rescue him. Arjuna is your friend and your disciple. You can tell him all this.

Let this rescue by the Pandavas teach Duryodhana a lesson. It will be humiliation enough for him to find himself obliged to the Pandavas. This was the command of your father. As for my releasing these sinners, I will not hand them over to you. You have been sent by Yudhishthira. I will surrender my prisoners to him. Let him do what he pleases with them".

The entire party went to Yudhishthira. He released the captives and said: "My dear Chitrasena, I am grateful to you for this. I did not want any stigma attached to our name: that we allowed our cousins to be captured by you when they appealed to us for help. These people can go where they please. Their bondage is over". Chitrasena returned to his realm. Yudhishthira turned his eyes on Duryodhana. There was gentleness and pity in them. There was no hatred there. He addressed Duryodhana: "Duryodhana, do not ever do such a stupid thing again. Spite never brings you happiness. Please go back to your kingdom. I wish you well".

With his face cast down because of his extreme humiliation, Duryodhana left the presence of Yudhishthira and went away.

Chapter 17

PRAAYOPAVESA

Duryodhana turned homewards with his army. When he had gone part of the way, he sent his army away to Hastinapura. He walked about in a lonely spot. Sick of everything, he sat down somewhere. Immersed in the saddest of thoughts, he did not know the passage of time. His face reflected his sorrow. He looked like the moon eclipsed by Rahu. He did not know how long he sat thus. Suddenly he heard the voice of Radheya behind him. Radheya said: "It is fortunate that you have been able to rout the army of the gandharva. I never thought that we would meet. I could not meet the onslaught of arrows which he rained on me. I tried by best. But he was too powerful. He fought with the help of maya. I had to leave the battlefield. I could do nothing. There is no one like you. You have done what I could not do. You have been able to send them back to their realm. I congratulate you, my lord".

The unfortunate Duryodhana could not bear to hear any more. Tears flowed from his eyes. His voice was harsh with pain. He told his friends: "I can see that you do not know anything. You think that

the gandharva army was routed by me. Not I, nor my uncle, nor my brothers were able to face him. We were completely defeated". He told Radheya everything. He told him how Arjuna told the gandharva: "You must release our Duryodhana and his womenfolk". Duryodhana continued: "This gandharva is a friend of Arjuna. His name is Chitrasena. He told them all about our plans. He told them why we came to Dwaitavana. I felt just awful. It seems Indra sent this gandharva to punish me. When I heard him tell the Pandavas about our reason for coming here, I felt so ashamed of myself. I prayed that the earth might split into two and swallow me up. We were taken to the presence of Yudhishthira. It was left to him to decide what was to be done about us. Radheya, can you think of anything more humiliating than that? To stand there, in the presence of that man whom we have wronged so? I stood, bound hand and foot, with all my brothers and all our women. And I was forgiven by my enemy, my sworn enemy. I had hoped to defeat them in war. If I could not, I had hoped for the heaven which a man attains when he dies on the field of battle. That would have been glory for me. Radheya, listen to the worst of it. Yudhishthira smiled at me in his gentle manner. He smiled at me, Radheya, with pity and with affection. He said: 'Duryodhana, do not ever do such a stupid thing again. Spite never brings you happiness. Please go back to your kingdom. I wish you well'. Did you hear that? Yudhishthira wished me well! I have no face to live after this incident. I have made up my mind. I will not leave this spot until my life leaves my body. I will starve, and deny myself even water. I have decided to kill myself thus. You must return to Hastinapura with all the retinue. I will not come back to that city. All these days I have been treading on the heads of my enemies. I have danced on their breasts. Now I have been ruined by my own fault. How can I speak to them? I have been proud, conceited, arrogant, because of my fortune and my kingdom. In my foolishness and my vanity I have brought this upon myself. I will starve and die on this spot. This is the only way. How can I live after getting my life back by the kindness of my enemies? I have been sorely insulted. I have always been proud, jealous of my honour. The Pandavas will laugh at me. I cannot bear it. I will die. That is the only way for me".

Dussasana had come during this time. The king told Dussasana: "Listen to me, Dussasana. You can be king, now that I will be gone. Rule this country with the help of Radheya and Sakuni. Be a king in every sense of the word. You must combine justice with mercy when you punish. You can learn all that from uncle Vidura. He is the best teacher". Duryodhana came near Radheya and embraced him

warmly. He said: "I had hoped to share this kingdom with you. But all that is just a dream. This is real".

Dussasana fell at his feet. His eyes were almost blind with tears. He caught both the feet of his brother in his hands. He would not let go. He said: "What folly is this, brother mine? Why should you die? What is this you are asking me to do? Let the sky fall on the earth or the sun slip from his orbit. I will not rule the kingdom as you are asking me to do. I will never let this happen. You dead, and I to be the king! My lord, is this all the love you have for me? The bond among the five Pandavas is the same as that among us brothers. We adore you. You mean everything to us. Can any one of us live if you decide to leave us? Please do not do this to us. Please calm yourself and forget this incident". He cried like a little child, in a loud voice. His grief was great. Radheya said: "My lord, there is nothing here to mourn about. This was a childish prank which we practised. It did not succeed as we hoped. We must forget it. The Pandavas are noble. We have always known it. They did what they did, because it is the duty of a kshatriya to help the oppressed. This was a very unfortunate happening. But you must be more firm. You must not be so sensitive about it. You must not hurt all of us by doing this drastic thing. Please abandon the idea and come back to Hastinapura. Can any one of us live after this calamity happens? Is there anything worthwhile in the world once the great Duryodhana dies? No. Nothing. Please come back to your kingdom and rule us all with justice and love. We cannot be without you. You must listen to me. You must come back to the city with us. If you do not, do you think I will go back? I will sit at your feet. I will live only just as long as you live, not a moment more".

Sakuni had come there in the meantime. He was watching Duryo dhana with a smile of amusement. He said: "You have heard all that Radheya and Dussasana said. It is not right that you should attach so much importance to such a trivial happening. Killing oneself is not becoming to a kshatriya. You are throwing away all the wealth and the kingdom which I won for you. Your grief is unmanly. It shows a nature unseasoned by suffering. Do not spoil the grace of the gesture of the noble Pandavas by your sorrow. If you are really convinced that your actions so far have been wicked since they were aimed at these good cousins of yours, you can repay their nobility by an act even more noble. You say your reputation is lost. You can regain it in a moment by restoring their kingdom to the sons of Kunti. All the three worlds will then resound with praises of you and your greatness. Make friends with the Pandavas. Yudhishthira treated you like a brother. You can do the same too. Why don't you do it? That

at least, will be a worthy action. Instead of that, you are behaving like a sulky child which has been scolded. Do not be foolish. You can kill your foes if you are alive, and only if you are alive. Give up this foolish notion".

Duryodhana would not let himself be persuaded by any of them. He made them all leave him alone. He spread kusa grass on the ground and sat on it, intent on meditation. All his retinue went some distance away from him and camped there. The night was spent by Duryodhana on the kusa grass. While he was alone he felt that he was in a trance. Perhaps his evil genius spoke to him. His penitence was passing. He felt as though someone told him: "You will rule the earth. Why die? You have Radheya, Dussasana, Bheeshma, Drona and Aswatthama to fight for you. You have so many friends to help you. Why should you be afraid of the Pandavas or of their nobility? You can kill all of them easily".

CHAPTER 18

DURYODHANA'S RAJASUYA

In the morning Radheya came to Duryodhana and again asked him to abandon the idea of committing suicide. He said: "Let not this one gesture on the part of the Pandavas make you think that they have forgiven you for all the sufferings they have undergone because of you. No. They remember everything. You need have no fear about the future. I will kill Arjuna; you can kill Bheema. As for the other three, anyone can kill them. Come, my lord, rise up. A new day has dawned. A new hope has arisen in my heart: a hope that you will not refuse me my request". The words of Radheya and the dream-like experience of the night before together put new life into Duryodhana. With a smile he got up. He took Radheya's hand in his and said: "You are right, Radheya. You have made me see that I was about to do a foolish thing by committing suicide. I will not do it. I will live to fight with the Pandavas who are my enemies. They are not my brothers. I will kill them and rule this world. Or I will die and reach the heavens. My mind is firm". They all returned to Hastinapura with glad hearts.

The Kaurava army had returned to the city. News had preceded their arrival. Everyone knew what had happened in the forest. In the assembly hall Bheeshma tried to talk to wilful Duryodhana about

it. He said: "Look at what happened in the forest. You were not able to fight with the gandharva. Nor your dear Radheya either, on whom all your hopes are resting. The Pandavas are good and noble. They are also much better warriors than you and your friends. Why not you make it up with them and call for peace? It will be a fitting sequel to this Ghoshayatra episode". Duryodhana laughed loudly and walked out of the council hall. Bheeshma got disgusted with the whole crowd and went away to his palace.

After that Duryodhana told Radheya: "Ever since I saw the Rajasuya of Yudhishthira I have been wanting to perform it myself. With you to help me, I am sure I will be able to do it". Radheya said: "Most certainly! You must see to the arrangements. I will, in the meantime, go and conquer the kings who may dare to defy you". Duryodhana sent for the priests and told them: "I want to perform the Rajasuya. Please see to the preparations". They said: "It is not proper that you should perform this when Yudhishthira is alive, and when your father is alive. If, however, you insist, then of course, it must be performed. You must fix the place. You must plough it with your own hands and make arrangements for the building of the hall. The kings who are likely to defy you must also be conquered before you set about performing the Rajasuya". Duryodhana agreed to all the conditions that were set down.

Radheya set out on his conquests. Before his return, the other preparations were going on at furious speed. Everything was ready. Messengers were sent to all the kings, inviting them for the Rajasuya to be performed by the Kuru monarch Duryodhana. Dussasana sent a messenger to Dwaitavana. He said: "Go to the Pandavas and invite them all to the function". The servant went to the Pandavas and told them: "The Kaurava monarch Duryodhana is about to perform the Rajasuya. Everyone has been invited to attend it. Dhritarashtra and his son have sent me to you to invite you all to Hastinapura". Yudhishthira heard these words and said: "I am very happy to hear that Duryodhana is able to perform the Rajasuya. We would certainly have accepted the invitation if we had been free to do so. But we cannot enter the city of Hastinapura until the thirteen years are over". Bheema said: "After the expiry of the thirteen years we will enter the city. We will then perform a yajna where your king and his sinful henchmen will be the sacrificial goats. You can take this message of mine back to the king". The messenger went back and reported all the happenings at Dwaitavana.

The Rajasuya was performed by Duryodhana with great pomp and splendour. Many were the kings who attended it. Many of them were

the friends of the Kauravas and others had been conquered by Radheya in his campaign. There was nothing but joy in the heart of everyone. Dhritarashtra was happy that his son had performed the Rajasuya. There were some who compared it with Yudhishthira's Rajasuya and they said: "This is not so wonderful as that at Indraprastha. The grandeur is not one fraction of that. Yudhishthira's Rajasuya was far more impressive." But generally the comment was that it was a grand function and everyone said as much to the king Dhritarashtra and to Duryodhana.

When it was all over, Duryodhana paid due respects to all the elders and returned to his council hall. He embraced Radheya and said: "Radheya, because of you I was able to perform the Rajasuya. With your help too, I will be able to rid the world of the Pandavas and rule this world without any rivals". Radheya said: "I have said it often enough, my lord. But I will repeat it once again to please you. I now take an oath that I will kill Arjuna in the war. Let me not reach into the innermost portals of your heart until I achieve this. I swear that I will not wash my feet, that I will not eat meat or drink wine, until this oath of mine is fulfilled".

Duryodhana was immensely pleased with the devotion of Radheya. He said: "When the great Radheya is my refuge, why should I have any worry about the future? The Pandavas seem to me to be dead already".

Chapter 19

JAYADRATHA

It was the final year of the exile of the Pandavas. They had completed eleven years now. This was the most difficult year for them. Yudhishthira was the most unhappy of all of them. He felt sorry for his brothers and for Draupadi who had to suffer all this because of his foolishness. He spent sleepless nights thinking on all these things. An arrow seemed to be lodged for ever in his heart, hurting him without killing him. He remembered every word that had been spoken by the others in Hastinapura on that unforgettable day. The anger in his heart was being controlled with very great effort. Looking at their brother suffering, the others spoke not a word. They were sorry for him and his unhappiness.

Spies came to Yudhishthira from Hastinapura and told him about the oath of Radheya. Yudhishthira was very much upset by the news. From the day of the tournament when Radheya appeared as a comet in his sky, Yudhishthira knew no peace. He knew the greatness of Radheya and his mind was going through agony at the thought that there was every likelihood of the oath of Radheya being fulfilled. He knew his Arjuna and his greatness; still, Radheya was far superior to Arjuna and Yudhishthira was well aware of it. His restlessness increased. He told his brothers that he was tired of Dwaitavana and that they should go back to Kamyaka for the remaining year. They agreed. They left Dwaitavana with all their companions and proceeded to Kamyaka.

All the five brothers had gone out hunting one day. They had left Draupadi behind in the asrama with Dhaumya. When they were away, Jayadratha, the king of Sindhu, happened to pass by the asrama. He was on his way to the kingdom of Salva. By chance, he saw Draupadi standing at the doorway of the asrama. He did not know who she was. He only saw that she was a beautiful woman. She brightened the dark forest with her beauty like the lightning which brightens the blue sky at the dead of the night. He spoke to his friend: "I want that woman. Go and find out who she is". The friend did as he was told. He came back to Jayadratha and smiled at him pityingly. He said: "I am very sorry for you, my friend. She is dangerous to touch. She is the wife of the terrible Pandavas. You will be wiser if you abandon all hopes and go on to Salva. Let us go at once".

Jayadratha would not listen to the advice of his friend. He went to the asrama and announced himself as Jayadratha and enquired after the welfare of the Pandavas. Draupadi said: "I am very glad to see you. If you will take this seat and wait for a few minutes you can meet them. They have gone out hunting. Please wait". Jayadratha began to speak his mind. He told her how he was smitten with love for her and asked her to go with him, giving up those useless husbands who could not give her the comforts and security which were due to her. Draupadi was horrified to hear him speak thus. It was terrible. That her brother-in-law, the husband of little Dussala, should talk to her like this, was something she could not imagine. Her words of anger and scorn made him only more insistent. Finally he picked her up and carried her forcibly to his chariot. Dhaumya could not do anything against the formidable army of Jayadratha. With the cries of poor Draupadi ringing in his ears, the brahmin had to sit still, waiting for the coming of the Pandavas.

Evil omens warned Yudhishthira that something unpleasant was in store for them. The Pandavas hurried back to the asrama. They

heard from their guru Dhaumya that Jayadratha had carried away Draupadi. All five of them went in pursuit of Jayadratha. They challenged him. He did not think that they would return so soon from their hunting. There was a fight. The army of Jayadratha was quite formidable. But it melted in front of the fury of the Pandavas. The king of the Sindhus was defeated easily. In fact, leaving Draupadi in the chariot, Jayadratha jumped out and fled from the presence of the Pandavas. Sahadeva rushed to the chariot, undid the ropes which bound Draupadi to it and brought Draupadi down. Bheema went on sending arrow after arrow at all the soldiers. Arjuna prevented him from this and said: "Bheema, stop this massacre. The real cause of this has run away from the fight. What is the meaning of killing the soldiers who are, after all, doing only what their master has asked them to do? Stop this action which is unchivalrous". Bheema spoke to Yudhishthira: "My revered brother, please take our queen to the asrama. Also take Dhaumya, Nakula and Sahadeva. As for me, I will not move from here until I kill that fool who dared to lay his hands on Draupadi. I am yet to see a man live after that". Yudhishthira said: "Listen to me, Bheema. I will not allow you to kill him. I forbid it. He is the son-in-law of our family. He must be spared at least for the sake of our mother Gandhari and for our little sister Dussala".

Bheema and Arjuna followed the run-away king. They taunted him with cruel words. Not being able to bear it, the poor run-away had to return and fight. The brothers vanquished him easily. Not satisfied with this, Bheema ran to him and caught him by the hair. He pushed him down to the ground and stamped on his head. Jayadratha became unconscious. With great difficulty Arjuna dragged Bheema away from the prostrate form of Jayadratha. Bheema disfigured Jayadratha by cutting his hair in a grotesque manner. He found that he had regained consciousness. He said: "You miserable worm, are you surprised that you are still alive? If you have been let off with your life, it is not because of me. I was all for killing you. It is because of my brother Yudhishthira who loves mother Gandhari too much. It is because of Arjuna who does not like to harass a fallen enemy. I would not have hesitated to kill you. I will take you to my brother. Let him do what he pleases with you". The two brothers led their prisoner to the asrama. Yudhishthira felt sorry for Jayadratha. He asked Bheema to release him. Jayadratha went away with his face downcast. He had been insulted sorely by the Pandavas. He could think of nothing else. He would not go back to his kingdom.

There, on the banks of the river Ganga, Jayadratha performed tapas. He was bent on pleasing Sankara with his tapas. He was there for many days. Pleased with his tapas, Sankara appeared before him and asked him what he wanted. Jayadratha said: "I must be able to defeat all the Pandavas in the war". Sankara said: "That is out of the question. It is impossible for me to grant that boon. The Pandavas cannot be conquered, they cannot be killed. Even if I were to fight with them, I cannot win. They are invincible. They are protected by Krishna, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu Himself. If, however, you meet the Pandavas without Arjuna and Krishna, for just that time I will grant you the power to defy them. It is not possible for me to grant more than this". Jayadratha was glad that he had been able to achieve at least this. He felt happy.

A few days after the Jayadratha incident, Sage Markandeya came to the Kamyaka forest to meet the Pandavas. He was a great comfort to the bruised heart of Yudhishthira. He would comfort Yudhishthira with his stories and his words of advice. Once, he told him that he was not the only king who was unfortunate. He had already told him about Nala the king of Nishadha. He now related the story of the Ramayana and the story of Savitri who was able to outwit Yama the god of death by her wise talk and her devotion to her husband. Markandeya was full of wisdom and he knew how unhappy Yudhishthira was. He made the last year of the exile bearable for the poor unfortunate Yudhishthira who was burning with self-reproach.

The last year of their exile seemed longer to the Pandavas than all the other eleven put together. This time of waiting was just unbearable. A year and a few months more and then they could KILL the sons of Dhritarashtra and that hated Radheya. Yudhishthira's worry about Radheya was increasing day by day. He spent sleepless nights thinking of Radheya, Radheya who spoke so cruelly to Draupadi on the day when he played that game of dice. Yudhishthira was more impatient than the others even. He was finding that his body burned day and night as though with a fever. He had been asking Bheema and Draupadi to be patient, all these years. They would accuse him of having no feelings for their unhappiness, that he was an unnatural kshatriya, that he was too forgiving, that he was too patient. But they did not know, could never guess how difficult it was for Yudhishthira to control his feelings, how hard it was for him to follow the rigid code he had set for himself, the path of Dharma. This path was not easy at all. It was the most difficult thing to follow. The severe restraint Yudhishthira had imposed on himself was now trying to burst its bonds. He was suffering; and in silence. He would not let anyone

see his pain and his unhappiness. So passed the last few months of the exile. The restlessness grew so much that he again wanted a change. So, he, along with the others, went back to the picturesque forest of Dwaitavana.

CHAPTER 20

THE LAKE OF DEATH

Once, when the Pandavas were living in Dwaitavana—it was during their final stay of a few months--a brahmin came to Yudhishthira with an appeal. He said that a deer had entered his hut and carried away the sticks used for making fire, the Arani as it is called. The daily ritual was to rub these sticks together and get fire. No house should be without fire. The fire got out of the sticks had to be worshipped every day. The brahmin was frantic with worry because of this calamity and requested the five brothers to follow the deer and rescue the sticks from the horns of the deer where they had become entangled. The Pandavas left at once and went in pursuit of the deer. They followed it very far but suddenly it disappeared from their sight. They did not know what to do. Yudhishthira was unhappy because he could not please the brahmin. Depressed in mind and fatigued by thirst and hunger, they sat down under the shade of a huge tree. They were very unhappy. Sitting under the shade of the banyan tree they tried to find a reason for this calamity, because it was to them a calamity since they could not satisfy a brahmin. Nakula said: "My lord, in our race we have never swerved from the path of Dharma. Why then, should this have happened to us?" Yudhishthira said: "My dear child, do you not know that when calamities befall a person, they always come in numbers and never singly? One can only bear them. It is not ours to question the reason behind these happenings. They are sent to us and we have to bear them".

Bheema said: "My lord, I know why this has happened to us. If I had killed that sinner Dussasana when he dragged Draupadi to the court this would not have happened. It was a sin to have let him live. That is why we are made to face this calamity". Arjuna said: "I should not have been patient on that day when Radheya insulted Draupadi. That is a sin I have committed. His words pierced me to the marrow of my bones and yet I did not kill him. That is why this calamity has befallen us". And Sahadeva said: "If only I had killed Sakuni

on the day when he played the game of dice, this would never have happened to us". Yudhishthira smiled at them all and said: "This is not the time to look back and think of the might-have-beens. Our immediate worry is this: How are we to quench this dreadful thirst that has been troubling us since some time? Nakula, get up on the tree and look around. See if you can find any spot of water in the neighbourhood. We are all almost dying with thirst". Nakula did as he was told. He said: "I can see a lake just near by". They were all so happy to hear it. Yudhishthira said: "My child, go at once and bring water for all of us". Nakula hurried to the lake.

He reached the lake. The water looked so cool and inviting. He went near it to drink it. Suddenly he heard a voice from nowhere. It said: "You must not drink the water of this lake, not before you have answered certain questions of mine. You can neither drink this water nor can you carry it unless you answer my questions". Nakula did not pay any heed to this voice coming from nowhere. He was very thirsty. He rushed to the brink of the lake and drank the cold water eagerly. Immediately Nakula fell down dead.

The others waited for him for a long time. But Nakula did not return. Yudhishthira sent Sahadeva to go in search of his brother. Sahadeva reached the lake. He saw the dead form of his brother on the ground. He was shocked at the sight. But his thirst was so great that he rushed towards the water as Nakula had done. The same voice was heard with the same warning. But Sahadeva was like Nakula. He disregarded the warning and drank the water and suffered the same fate as his brother. Yudhishthira next sent Arjuna and then Bheema. Not one of them came back. Yudhishthira waited for a long time and yet they did not come back. Intrigued by this, and with misgivings of the mind, Yudhishthira walked towards the lake. He reached it soon. He stopped in his tracks, horrified by the sight that met his eyes. He saw all his brothers there, dead.

Yudhishthira was stunned by this. He said: "How did this happen? There is no trace of fighting here. It is impossible to believe that these four could have been killed without their fighting for their lives. There must have been some treachery. What could have caused this?" Overcome by sorrow, Yudhishthira stood looking at the dead forms of his beloved brothers. His knees could not hold him up. He felt faint. He just sat down there. He had no tears to shed; the calamity was too much for ordinary tears. He held his head in his two hands and sat like a figure carved out of stone. He spoke to himself: "Now, our dear cousins will be happy. Duryodhana's dream has been realized. Sakuni has achieved what he set out to do.

Perhaps they have sent someone, some spies, to kill these brothers of mine without warning. How can I answer the questioning eyes of my mother and Draupadi? These four suffered all these years because of me. And now, when freedom is near at hand, these brothers of mine have been killed. How can I live any longer in this world, alone, without them? How is it that I have been spared and not they? Where is that quick death that overtook them? Why has it not come to me yet?" Thought chased thought in his poor distraught mind. Yudhishthira was almost mad with grief. His roving eyes fell on the cool water and his thirst came back. His throat was parched and dry with unshed tears. He walked to the brink of the lake and was about to drink the water, when he was arrested by the unearthly voice. He was told that he should not drink until some questions were answered. Yudhishthira paused in the act of drinking. He looked around to locate the source of the voice. The voice said: "I saw your brothers come here one by one. I told them not to drink. They would not listen to me. They drank and died. I am the yaksha who owns this lake". Yudhishthira's voice was hoarse with unshed tears. He said: "What yaksha are you? Are you one of the Rudras? Are you the chief among the Maruts? Who are you that could fell, at one stroke, these masses of strength? My brothers are invincible. No one, not even a god, can kill any one of them. But you have killed all four of them. They were not even allowed to fight for their lives. My lord, I am overcome with terror and admiration for you. I am curious to know the identity of one who could do this to my brothers. I am amazed at your power. Please reveal yourself to me. I want to see you". The yaksha appeared in front of Yudhishthira. He was indeed a gruesome spectacle.

Yudhishthira saluted the yaksha for his power and said: "I am honoured by your appearance. It is indeed gracious on your part to have granted me my request. I feel very grateful to you". The yaksha said: "Your brothers would not listen to me. I am telling you also. This lake belongs to me. You are not allowed to drink this water unless you answer certain questions of mine". Yudhishthira said: "My lord, I will not insult you by disregarding your words. You say that this lake belongs to you. In that case, I have no right, absolutely no right, to touch it unless you permit me to do so. I will agree to your conditions. You can ask me any questions. I will try to find answers for them. I will try, to the best of my ability, to please you with my answers".

Chapter 21

YAKSHA-PRASNA

The Yaksha said: "Your brother Arjuna tried to fight for his life. He threatened to kill me with his arrows. He invoked all the divine astras which he had at his command and aimed them at me. But he could do nothing, not to me. I asked him just to answer my questions. He refused and he drank the water and died. I am pleased with your humility. I will ask you to answer several questions on ethics".

"So be it", said Yudhishthira.

Then began the questions and answers.

Q. What makes the sun rise?
A. Brahma makes the sun rise.
Q Whom has he for companion?
A. His company is kept by the gods.
Q. Who is the cause for the setting of the sun?
A. Dharma causes him to set.
Q. In whom is the sun established?
A. The sun is established in Truth.
Q. What makes one learned?
A. The study of the Srutis make one learned.
Q. How is man to attain what is great?
A. Ascetic austerities help a man to achieve the great.
Q. How is it possible for a man always to have a second companion?
A. Steady intelligence serves man as a helpful companion always.
Q. This intelligence you speak of, how is it to be acquired?
A. Serving the old makes one rich in wisdom.
Q. How are brahmins ranked with divine beings? Why?
A. They are considered divine because they study the Vedas.
Q. What is it they practise which makes them pious?
A. Their asceticism makes them behave as they do and so they are pious.
Q. The brahmins are ranked with divine beings. How are they then, different from divine beings?
A. Brahmins are mortal and divine beings are not. It is this liability to die that makes them not quite divine.
Q. What of kshatriyas? Wherein lies their divinity?
A. It lies in arrows and weapons.

Q. What is their practice which makes them pious?
A. Kshatriyas perform sacrifices and that makes them pious.
Q. Liability to death makes brahmins less divine. What of kshatriyas?
A. In their case it is liability to fear.
Q. Tell me about sacrifices. What is meant by the Sama in a sacrifice? And Yajus? There is something which is the refuge of sacrifice. What is it? What is essential for sacrifice?
A. Life is the Sama and mind is the Yajus. Rik is the refuge of sacrifice and it is Rik which is essential for sacrifice.
Q. There is found a person who enjoys all the objects of the senses. He is intelligent. The world holds him in esteem and he is quite popular. And yet, though this man breathes, it is said that he does not live. Why?
A. A man, though he breathes, is considered to be not alive if he does not offer anything to the gods, guests, servants and the Pithris.
Q. What is weightier than the earth itself?
A. The mother has more weight than the earth.
Q. What is higher than the heavens?
A. The father.
Q. What is fleeter than the wind?
A. The mind is fleeter than the wind.
Q. What is more numerous than grass?
A. The thoughts that arise in the mind of man are more numerous.
Q. What is the highest refuge of virtue?
A. Liberality is the highest refuge of virtue.
Q. Of fame?
A. Gift is the highest refuge of fame.
Q. Of heaven?
A. Truth is the highest refuge of heaven.
Q. Of happiness?
A. Good behaviour is the highest refuge of happiness.
Q. What is the soul of man?
A. His son.
Q. Who is the friend granted by gods to man?
A. The wife is the friend bestowed on man by the gods.
Q. His chief support?
A. The clouds.
Q. His chief refuge?
A. Gift.
Q. The best of all things that are praised: what is it?
A. The most praiseworthy thing is skill.

Q. The most valuable of all possessions?
A. Knowledge.
Q. The best of all gains?
A. Health.
Q. The best of all kinds of happiness?
A. Contentment.
Q. What is the highest duty in the world?
A. To abstain from injury is the highest of all duties.
Q. What is it, controlling which will lead to no regret?
A. The mind, if controlled, will never lead to regret.
Q. What is that, which, when renounced, makes one agreeable?
A. Pride, when renounced, makes one agreeable.
Q. Renouncing what does one become wealthy?
A. Desire, when renounced, makes one wealthy.
Q. What is it, when renounced, leads to no regret?
A. Wrath, when renounced, leads to no regret.
Q. Renouncing what does make man happy?
A. Avarice, when renounced, makes a man happy.
Q. What is THE WAY? By whom is it constituted?
A. Those that are good constitute THE WAY.
Q. What is the sign of asceticism?
A. Staying in one's own religion is asceticism.
Q. True restraint?
A. The restraint of the mind is true restraint.
Q. What is the essential feature of forgiveness?
A. Forgiveness consists in enduring enmity.
Q. What is shame?
A. Shame is withdrawing from all unworthy acts.
Q. What is said to be knowledge?
A. True knowledge is the knowledge of divinity.
Q. What is tranquillity?
A. True tranquillity is that of the heart.
Q. What is mercy?
A. Mercy means wishing happiness for all.
Q. What is simplicity?
A. Simplicity is equanimity of the heart.
Q. Can you tell me what enemy is invincible?
A. Anger.
Q. What disease is incurable?
A. Covetousness is an incurable disease.
Q. Which man is considered honest?
A. He who desires the good of all creatures is honest.

Q. Which man is dishonest?
A. One who is not merciful is dishonest.
Q. What is ignorance?
A. True ignorance is not knowing one's duties.
Q. And pride?
A. Pride is a consciousness of one's being himself an actor or sufferer in life.
Q. What is idleness?
A. Not discharging one's duties is idleness.
Q. Grief? What is grief?
A. Ignorance is grief.
Q. What is patience?
A. Patience is subjugating the senses.
Q. What is real ablution?
A. A true bath consists in washing the mind clean of all impurities.
Q. What is charity?
A. Charity consists in protecting all creatures.
Q. What is wickedness?
A. Wickedness is speaking ill of others.
Q. By what does one become a brahmin? Is it behaviour? Or birth? Or study? Or learning?
A. Neither birth nor study nor even learning makes a brahmin. It is behaviour that makes a brahmin. If his behaviour is faultless the man is faultless too. Bad conduct damns a man for ever. Study of the Vedas is not enough if a man does not conduct himself properly.
Q. What is the reward for one who always speaks agreeable words?
A. Why, he becomes agreeable to all.
Q. When he acts with judgement?
A. He gets whatever he seeks.
Q. When he has many friends?
A. He lives happily.
Q. If he is devoted to virtue?
A. He obtains a happy state in the next world.
Q. What is the most wonderful thing in this world?
A. Day after day there enter into the Temple of Death, countless lives. Looking on this spectacle, the rest of them, those who remain, believe themselves to be permanent, immortal. Can anything be more wonderful than this?
Q. What is THE PATH?
A. Arguments lead to no certain conclusions. The Srutis are all different, one from the other. There is not even one rishi whose opinion can be accepted as infallible. The truth about

religion and duty is hidden in the caves. Therefore, THAT alone is THE PATH along which the Great have trod.

Q. What is THE NEWS?

A. The world full of ignorance is like a pan. The sun is fire. The days and nights are the fuel. The months and the seasons constitute the wooden handle. TIME is the COOK that is cooking all creatures in that pan. That is THE NEWS.

Q. Who is truly a MAN?

A. The report of one's good actions reach heaven and it is spread over the earth. As long as that report lasts, so long is that person called a MAN.

Q. Which is the man who is considered to possess every kind of wealth?

A. The man to whom the agreeable and the disagreeable, weal and woe, the past and the future, are the same, is considered to possess every kind of wealth.

The Yaksha said: "I am immensely pleased with your answers. You are the wisest and the most righteous person in this world. To show my pleasure I now grant you a boon. I will grant the life of one of your brothers. You are at liberty to choose". Yudhishthira said: "Please, my lord, then let this dark, young, handsome brother of mine, Nakula, come back to life". The Yaksha was amazed at his choice. He said: "I am surprised at you. I know that Bheema is dear to you. Arjuna is the one person on whom you are depending for your victory in the war. He has been preparing himself for it for the last so many years. Why did you not choose either Bheema or Arjuna? Bheema would have killed all the sons of Dhritarashtra. Bheema, with his powerful figure and his terrible temper, is dear to you. Why did you not ask me to let him live? Why not Arjuna? Why did your choice fall on Nakula?"

Yudhishthira said: "I would rather give up my life than give up Dharma. I want the world to know that I will never abandon Dharma. My father had two wives, Kuntidevi and Maadridevi. I want both their children to live. I am the son of Kunti and Nakula is the son of Maadri. I love both my mothers equally. I cannot gladden the heart of one and hurt the other. So, Nakula it will be if one of my brothers is to live".

The Yaksha was very pleased with the nobility of Yudhishthira. He said: "You are great. I will never look upon the like of you anywhere at any time. I am very happy to grant you the lives of ALL YOUR BROTHERS".

The moment he said it, all the brothers rose up as though from

a deep sleep. They found that their thirst and hunger and fatigue had all vanished.

Yudhishthira embraced them all again and again. Tears flowed from his eyes. He fell at the feet of the yaksha and said: "My lord! I want to know who you are. You are not a yaksha. No yaksha knows all the nuances of dharma as you do. You must be a god from above. You are someone very dear to us. Perhaps you are our father Pandu. Whoever you may be, you must reveal yourself to me. I am eager to know who you are".

The yaksha lost his gruesome form. He stood resplendent in his natural form. He smiled at Yudhishthira and said: "I am DHARMA, your father. I wanted to see you and talk to you. I am very pleased with you. You will conquer the world with these brothers of yours. But what is pleasing to me is the fact that you have already conquered my kingdom: the kingdom called RIGHTEOUSNESS. Earthly conquests are but pale and insignificant beside your conquest. Yours will be the greatest name that will be remembered by people in aftertimes. In Kali yuga, the fourth quarter of Time, if people just pronounce your name they will become dear to me. Four names will have this greatness. The name of the king Nala of Nishadha, your name, the name of Seeta the wife of Sree Rama. The fourth is the name of one who is very dear to all of you, Krishna. As for the Arani sticks stolen from the brahmin, they were stolen by me. I wanted to get you to this lake. Now you can take them back to him. I will grant you another boon. Your exile of twelve years is over. The last and most difficult year is imminent. You are all clothed in the armour of dharma. I assure you, because of my grace, no one will be able to recognize you at any time. You can disguise yourselves and go anywhere you choose. No one will be able to find out your real identities".

Yudhishthira was delirious with joy. He had met his father. He fell at his feet. He kissed them again and again. He placed his head on the two feet of his father and wept unrestrainedly. Then he controlled himself to an extent and said: "My lord! I do not want anything else in life. I have seen your blessed form. I have seen my father. I will receive with gratitude all the boons you are pleased to confer on me. But, my lord! I want just one more boon. I want you to grant me one more boon". "Ask me", said Dharma. "I will grant you anything you want". Yudhishthira said: "My lord! Please grant me victory in my fight over six of my deadly enemies: lust, anger, avarice, possessiveness, arrogance and envy. Please grant that my mind be always led towards Truth. I want nothing else in this world".

Dharma smiled at Yudhishthira and said: "My child, there is no need to grant you something you already have! You have conquered

these enemies long ago! Go, my children, and be happy. Your sufferings will soon be over. I am on your side. Where I am, there will Victory be. Where Krishna is, there will I always be. Nothing can hurt you as long as you think of me. I wish you well".

Their twelve years of exile had come to an end. They had one year left, the most difficult year, the year of hiding. They knew that Duryodhana would try his level best to discover their hiding place and send them on an exile of another twelve years. This year threatened to be more difficult than all the other twelve put together. But they did not flinch. The assurance of the lord of Dharma put new life into the hearts of the Pandavas. They began to discuss the plans for their Ajnaatavaasa.

VIRATA PARVA

CHAPTER 1

PLANS FOR THE THIRTEENTH YEAR

Yudhishthira collected all the people round him, the people who were till then his companions, and said: "It is known to all of you that we have been asked to spend twelve years in the forest and the thirteenth year in hiding. With you all as my companions, we managed to spend the twelve years. But for your company, we would have found it very hard to bear our misfortune. Now, the twelve years are over. We request you for permission to leave you and go. We have to be in disguise and no one should know our whereabouts. I hope that I can, at the end of the next year, get my kingdom back and be able to have you all with me for ever and ever". As he was saying these words, Yudhishthira's voice failed. He broke down with sorrow. He almost fainted away. So great was the emotion in his heart at the thought of leaving them and going away into the unknown.

Dhaumya pacified him and said that like the sun which emerges from behind a dark cloud the Pandavas would shine forth after the year was over. Bheema had to console Yudhishthira and cheer him up. Yudhishthira took leave of all the dwellers in the forest. They blessed them and went away. The Pandavas, with Draupadi and Dhaumya, went to a lonely place and began to consider their future plans. Yudhishthira said: "I want to know all your opinions about the country which we have to choose as our next dwelling place. We must be safe from the eyes of Duryodhana and his spies". Arjuna said: "There are many beautiful places. We can choose from any of them. I can suggest Panchala, Matsya, Salva, Videha, Dwaraka, Kalinga and Magadha. I have heard that the city called Virata is a very picturesque city. There are many other cities. We can be unnoticed only in a city. You must choose one of these and we will abide by your decision". Yudhishthira said: "Considering everything, I feel that the city you spoke about, Virata in the Matsya kingdom, is most suited to our purpose. I would have loved to go to Panchala or Dwaraka. But they will be the first places where Duryodhana will look for us. As for the other countries, I do not know much about the kings. But the king of Matsya is a good man. He is well-known for his noble and generous qualities. He is not a young man either. He is a man I am sure to like. We will spend the next twelve months in the city called Virata. That is settled. Now what are the roles we are going to play? Let us decide that also".

From being a subject of worry, this thirteenth year was now trying to appear to them an adventure. They discussed it with enthusiasm. But suddenly a sadness fell on the younger brothers of Yudhishthira. Arjuna said: "My lord! You have been lord of the earth. Even during the twelve years in the forest you have never had to obey orders from anyone. How can you work under any man? How can we bear to see you as a dependent under some king? You must not work under any master. I cannot bear to think on it". Yudhishthira smiled and took Arjuna's hand in his. He wiped his eyes gently and said: "Arjuna, do not be unhappy. I will not let anyone insult me. I have decided to be the companion to the king, not his courtier. Listen to me. I will go to the king and tell him that my name is Kanka. I will wear garments suited to a person who has few desires in this world. I will tell him that my knowledge of the Vedas and the philosophies is profound. I will wear garlands of Tulasi and crystals and I will be counting the rosaries all the time. I will also tell him that I am proficient in the game of dice". Here the face of Yudhishthira was lit up by a mischievous smile. He looked at Bheema who looked at him and then at the ground, a blush suffusing his face. Yudhishthira continued: "I will keep him company all the time. I have a feeling I am going to enjoy these twelve months". Everyone thought that his idea was good. The Matsya king was sure to treat their brother honourably.

Yudhishthira asked Bheema: "My dear Bheema, how are you going to conceal your strength and anger for twelve months? For the sake of a few flowers which Draupadi wanted, you destroyed a whole army of rakshasas. On the least pretext, on the least provocation, your eyes will become copper red. I do not know how you are going to stay for twelve months in Virata, obeying the orders of others. What are you planning to do, by beloved Bheema?" Bheema smiled and said: "Please do not worry about me, my brother. I have decided on the role I am going to play. I will be chief cook in the kitchen of the king. You know cooking has always been my hobby. I enjoy cooking tasty dishes. I will use that accomplishment to advantage now. I will go to the king. I will approach him with the proposal that I will take charge of his kitchen. I will also tell him that I am a great wrestler. I will be in charge of his gymnasium. I can train all the youngsters in the art of wrestling. The king will like that, I am sure. If he asks for any references I will tell him that I was previously employed in the kitchen of Yudhishthira and that since he has gone into exile I had to look elsewhere for work, that since I had heard that the Matsya king is very much like Yudhishthira I want to stay with him. He is sure to believe me. My name will be Valala".

Yudhishthira asked Arjuna: "My dear Arjuna, what are your plans?

I do not know how you will be able to conceal your bravery and live like a tame servant. I feel so sorry for the trouble you all have to go through because of me". Arjuna said: "My lord, there is one disguise I have. I have decided on it long ago. I am sure you have not forgotten the curse of Urvasi. Indra told me that it had to be borne by me for just a year. He told me too, that it would come in useful during this year. There is also this point. I am well-known for the scars on both my shoulders because of my being amphidexterous. I must not be recognized by my scars. The only way I can hide it is by covering my chest and shoulders by a blouse as women do. I will wear my hair long, so that my wide shoulders may be hidden. I am well versed in dancing, in singing, in playing on all the musical instruments. I will tell the king that I am a very good teacher of music and dancing. I will offer to train the women in his harem to be excellent singers and dancers. Since I will be a eunuch, the king will have no misgivings about allowing me into the women's chambers. I will call myself Brihannala".

Yudhishthira looked at Nakula and said: "My dear child, my handsome Nakula, how are you going to hide your beauty and your pride? You are so very sensitive. You are easily hurt. How can you bear this life of servitude?" Nakula smiled and said: "My dear brother, you know how good I am in the art of training horses. I have a way with them. They will listen to my words. I can coax them to do anything I ask. I will demonstrate before the king my power over these animals. He is sure to let me stay in his stables; I will be the man who will be in charge of the king's horses. I will call myself Damagranthi".

Sahadeva was the last. Yudhishthira said: "Sahadeva, my child, you are wiser than Brihaspati. You are more diplomatic than even Sukra the divine preceptor. You are the wisest of the five Pandavas. There is nothing that you do not know. You are a great politician. I have never seen the like of you. You are the favourite child of our mother. When we left Hastinapura she was most unhappy at the thought of parting from you. How can I let you, a child, do service under an ordinary man? What are you planning to do, my Sahadeva?" Sahadeva laughed softly and said: "I am no child, my lord! I will be able to tackle the king as cleverly as my brothers. I will make him see my knowledge of cows. Virata is a king whose chief wealth is cattle. I am very good at making the cows yield the best milk in the whole world. I am rather good at handling cows and bulls just as my brother is with horses. I will call myself by the name Tantripala."

Yudhishthira looked at Draupadi. He felt miserable to ask her what she was proposing to do. He said: "Draupadi, you are more

dear to us than our very lives. You are dear to our mother. You are so tender and delicate. How can you work? What can you do? I am so worried about you and your sensitive nature. You have suffered so much already. You must go through just another twelve months. Tell me, what are you going to do?" Draupadi smiled very lovingly at him and said: "My lord, why should you be so upset? When you, who had been the lord of the world, when you can do menial service, when Bheema, who can never obey anyone except you, when he can do service in the kitchen of the king, when my Arjuna who is the greatest of archers of this world, an archer who has defied Indra himself, when he can dance and sing, when this handsome dark Nakula, when he can be a stable boy, when Sahadeva, the wise and gentle Sahadeva, when he can be a cowherd, can I not do my little bit to make these twelve months pass safely and quickly? I will be Sairandhri. I will approach the queen and tell her that I am clever at decorating women. I will tell her that I can dress the hair in a hundred different ways. I will show her that I can string flowers of any shape and any size into beautiful garlands. I can show her how I can perfume her as no one else can. Looking on my accomplishments in the fascinating art of personal decoration she can never refuse to let me stay with her. I will take care of myself. Let us proceed to Virata".

Yudhishthira was very pleased with the arrangements. He was eager to embark on this new adventure. The Pandavas left Dwaitavana and went to Kamyaka. From there, they reached the banks of the river Yamuna. They walked along the southern bank of the Yamuna. They passed many beautiful forests and gardens. They reached the boundary of the kingdom of Matsya. There they took leave of Dhaumya. Yudhishthira said: "Please go to Panchala and spend the time there in the court of Drupada. Please do not tell even Drupada where we are. Just tell him that the Pandavas are now to begin their Ajnaatavaasa, that you have been sent by me to his court. All that you must tell him is that we have now left Dwaitavana". "So be it", said Dhaumya. He invoked the gods to bless the Pandavas, and went away.

Draupadi said: "It looks as though the capital city is still very far off. I am extremely tired. Let us rest here for the night and proceed further in the morning". Yudhishthira wanted to go some more distance and then call a halt. He therefore asked one of his brothers to carry Draupadi some distance. Nakula and Sahadeva were already too tired themselves. Arjuna carried Draupadi to the outskirts of the city of Virata. It was a pleasing sight to see him carry her. With his form draped in the rough garments made of tree bark, he looked like a dark rain cloud with a streak of lightning across its bosom.

CHAPTER 2

KANKA IN THE COURT OF VIRATA

The hiding of their weapons was their next problem. They had to leave them behind. Yudhishthira said: "If we enter the city with these, it will cause a commotion in the streets. We must not attract the attention of anyone. The world will be full of the spies of our dear cousin". The others agreed. Yudhishthira continued: "This Gandiva is too well-known. It must not be seen. If even one of us is seen with a weapon, the fact will reach Hastinapura. What then, about five? We must wrap them up carefully and leave them safely somewhere. We can come back for them a year later". Arjuna said: "This is the burning place, just beyond the city. Look, my lord, there is a tall Sami tree there! It is huge. Its branches are dense and strong. It is immense in size. It looks so very fearful. I do not think many people walk about here. Let us wrap our weapons in a piece of leather. Let us make the bundle resemble a corpse. We will hang the bundle from the topmost branch of the tree. I do not think anyone will have the courage to inspect it. We can then go to the city. Let us finish this job and spend the night here. Draupadi is also very tired. Let us enter the city tomorrow".

Yudhishthira approved of the idea. He collected all the weapons. It was a wrench for each one of them to give up his bow and arrows and swords and other things. They were the only companions they had till then. Very tenderly Arjuna wrapped up his Gandiva after loosening its string. Just before unstringing it, Arjuna twanged his bow just once as if to say: 'Till we meet again'. All the eyes were wet when the putting away of the weapons was being completed. It was all over. The bows and arrows and other weapons were very carefully and very tenderly wrapped up. Yudhishthira invoked the gods above and said: "I call upon all of you to be present here, now, to hear me. I ask Brahma, Indra, Kubera, Varuna, Rudra, Yama, Vishnu, Surya and Chandra, the sky, the earth, Agni and the Maruts, I ask all of you to guard these our dearest possessions. I hold you all to treat them as hostages. At the end of the year of our Ajnaatavaasa, I request you to return these weapons either to me or to Arjuna. IT MUST NOT BE GIVEN TO BHEEMA EVEN IF HE CLAIMS THEM. He is short-tempered; he is always angry with the sons of Dhritarashtra. He may, in a mad moment, claim these weapons without my knowing, in his anger against the cousins. He may do it before the year is com-

pleted. Ye gods, these must be guarded by you. I call upon all of you to bless us and send us forth into the unknown. You must guard us against discovery. We do not want to be exiled for another twelve years. We mean to fight the sons of Dhritarashtra. That is the end towards which we are journeying. Please bless us".

Yudhishthira climbed the tree himself and placed the bundle on it. He came down from the tree. Looking at Bheema and the tears in his eyes, Yudhishthira embraced him and wept for a long time. He pacified his pet brother with his gentle words, stroking him all the while with loving hands. The Pandavas were about to leave the place. Some villagers were looking at the ritual of climbing the tree, the deposition of the corpse and the recital of some incantations. They also saw that they were all weeping and that each was consoling the other. They saw Draupadi sobbing as if her heart would break. The villagers came near. The Pandavas told them that it was the dead body of their mother, that according to their custom funeral rites should not be performed, that the body had to be hung just like that for years, that if anyone did dare to disturb the body, death would fall on him immediately. The villagers believed the story. No one dared even to come near the Pandavas. They fled from there. Yudhishthira smiled at their credulous nature. He saw the carcass of a cow there. He told Sahadeva: "Look, here is a dead cow. Let us remove its hide and wrap it round our 'corpse'." It was done. It was a sensible thing to do since the weather would not harm the weapons any more now. The Pandavas left the spot. A thousand times they looked back. Sighs escaped all of them. They had to think of the days ahead of them now. There was no chance of their meeting each other. Till now, though they were in exile, they were always together. But these twelve months they would have to be parted. Moreover, they had to behave as strangers. That was the most terrible part of the ordeal. They decided on names for themselves which should be used as codes in case some emergency arose. These names were: Jaya, Jayesha, Vijaya, Jayatsena and Jayadbala. The Pandavas entered Virata.

Day dawned. They all bathed in the river. Yudhishthira then put on his disguise. He bade farewell to his brothers and to Draupadi and walked towards the palace of the king. He reached it in a short time. The king presented a noble picture. Yudhishthira was pleased with his appearance. He advanced boldly to the presence of the king. He did not salute the king. Yudhishthira just stood there; it looked as though one king was visiting another. The king of the Matsyas looked at him and spoke to himself: "Who can this person be? He has not saluted me. And yet, I do not feel offended. In fact, I feel that I should get up and honour him. I feel that he may be offended if I

do not salute him. He is dressed like a brahmin but his walk is that of a kshatriya. He walks like a tiger. He looks as though he is born to rule the world. I do not know who he is. He charms me with his noble carriage. I must please him in every way".

While these thoughts were taking shape in the mind of the king, Yudhishthira had approached the throne. The king got up from the throne and walked to the spot where Yudhishthira was standing. He took him by the hand and said: "I am honoured by the presence of a brahmin like you. I will be very happy to do anything you want me to do". Yudhishthira stated the facts in a simple short manner. He could not tell a lie, but he had to conceal the truth. He said: "I was a great friend of king Yudhishthira the lord of Indraprastha. You must have known of Yudhishthira who had to live in the forest with his brothers and their queen as a consequence of a game of dice. You can call me the soul of Yudhishthira, so dear are we to each other. My name is Kanka. I am used to spending all my time with Yudhishthira. I am as fond of the game of dice as he is. But now I am cleverer at it than what he was at the time he played and lost. He could never do anything without my knowledge. But Yudhishthira is now in hiding. I am grieved at the fate that has overtaken him and his brothers. I have come to you for succour. You are equal to Yudhishthira in your nobleness; so I have been told. Hence I have come to you. I have now no one whom I can call mine. I have no father, no mother, no one depending on me. I have no belongings. Today, happiness and sorrow weigh the same to me. Pleasant and unpleasant mean the same thing to me now. I am free of all desires. I have come to you in search of peace. Can I get it?"

Virata was touched by the dignified manner in which Yudhishthira spoke his words. His eyes were full of reverence and he said: "You have honoured our city by your presence. I am happy to have you with me. I am also extremely fond of dice. I am happy to get some player who can teach me to play the game as it ought to be played. You must use my kingdom and my wealth as if you own them". Yudhishthira said: "I have no need for all this wealth, O king. I have only one boon to ask of you. I will not eat food touched by anyone. I will eat just once in the night. I have taken an oath that I would observe this until one year is gone. I hope you will not be offended by my strange behaviour". The king agreed to his conditions. Thus ended the first meeting between the two kings.

Chapter 3

THE PANDAVAS IN VIRATA

A few days later Bheema entered the city of Virata. Carrying a ladle in his hand he entered the streets of the city and came to the palace of the king. Everyone was amazed at his physique. It was magnificent: there was no other word for it. He calmly entered the palace and came to the court of the king. No one prevented him from walking right in like that. The king looked at him and liked his appearance. Bheema came near the throne and said: "May God bless the king of the Matsyas. My lord, I have come to your court since I have heard about your noble nature and your sympathy for those who are in trouble. I am an excellent cook. It is not good to talk about oneself, but I have to since I have no one to recommend me. I can cook a thousand different tasty dishes. I will be happy if I am allowed to stay with you and please you".

The king looked at him and said: "Young man, you seem to be too good for the job you propose to take up. To me, you look like a prince in disguise. You are more fit to command an army sitting on an elephant or in a chariot. Your body seems to be so very well trained by exercise. You look so unlike a cook". Bheema laughed lightly and said: "You are right, my lord. I am not a cook by profession. I am a wrestler. I can defeat all the wrestlers in this world. Cooking is just my hobby. Being a hobby, it gives me great pleasure whenever I have a chance to practise it. I will take good care of your gymnasium. I can train young men to develop their bodies well. I will also be a cook in your kitchen". The King said: "I find you to be a charming person. I am happy to have you with me. You will not be just a cook. You will be in charge of my kitchen. You can supervise the entire kitchen and take care to teach the cooks all that you know. You will also be in charge of my gymnasium. I am very pleased to have you with me". Bheema said: "I am grateful to you, my lord, for these kind words. My name is Valala. I will take up my duties immediately". Two of the Pandavas were now successful in finding a hiding place. The court of Virata took on a new splendour since Yudhishthira was there. Bheema was happy since he enjoyed the tasks he had undertaken.

Arjuna entered the court of Virata. He was wearing his hair long. It was covering his shoulders. He was wearing necklaces made of corals and pearls. His form was draped in red silk. He was looking charm-

ing. His feminine attire hid his glory and at the same time it did not. He looked like the moon during the eclipse. Arjuna walked straight to the throne and said: "I am Brihannala, the dancer. I am well versed in all the fine arts that a woman should know. No one can make flower garlands for the hair as I can. As for my dancing and my music, I have learnt it from a gandharva. There is no one to equal me in these arts. I want to stay in your court and train your daughter in the fine arts of dancing and music. I hope you will have me".

The king was pleased with his manner of talking. He said: "You say you are a dancer. But to me, you look more like a warrior, specially an archer. Your arms and your chest make me think that if you had learnt archery you would have been an excellent archer. I like you very much. Tell me, are you really half-woman as you say? You must be an archer. I will entrust my kingdom to you. I am an old man. Stay with me and be like a son to me. I will give my kingdom and all that I have to you. You can rule my kingdom. You seem fitted to be a king and not to be a dancer".

Arjuna smiled a shy and charming smile and said: "My lord, the only string that I can twang is the string of the Veena. The only art I know is the art of dancing. I will be the tutor of Uttaraa, the princess. I will make her the greatest dancer in the world". The king said: "It will be as you wish. You can stay with me". He sent for his beautiful daughter Uttaraa and told her that the newcomer would be her companion from then on and that she could learn dancing and singing from her. He added: "She seems to be a high-born person. She does not seem to be an ordinary dancer. Treat her with the respect due to a queen. Take her to your apartments". Arjuna was happy to be the teacher to the sweet-natured charming daughter of Virata. Uttaraa's companions too began to learn dancing from him. Arjuna was enjoying the Ajnaatavaasa more than he thought.

The king was inspecting his horses. When he was going on his rounds he saw a dark handsome man looking at the horses with the eyes of one who loves horses. Virata thought to himself. "This man is the most handsome man I have ever seen. He attracts me. He seems to love horses. It looks as though he knows all about them. I can see it by the way he looks at them. I must summon him to my presence and find out who he is". Even as he was thinking of calling him to his presence, Nakula approached the king. After saluting him he said: "I have come to your city with the intention of earning a livelihood. I am an expert in the management of horses. If you will make me your servant, I will be grateful to you". Virata said: "You can be in charge of my beloved horses. I am happy to have an expert handling them with love and care. I am sure I will be leaving them in safe

hands. But to me, you seem to belong to some high caste and not that of a stable boy. How is it you are asking for work here? I do not think you are used to work. You seem better fitted to command someone else". Nakula smiled and said nothing. Virata said: "You can be in charge of the stables". Nakula was glad he was not asked many more questions. He said: "My name is Damagranthi. I will do my best to please you in every way". He was immensely pleased to be with the horses which he loved. He was almost as happy as he was in Indraprastha.

Sahadeva was the last to enter the sabha of Virata. He had put on the dress of a cowherd. With a staff in his hand he looked as charming as his cousin Krishna when he was in Gokula. Sahadeva came to the king and said: "Please make me the chief cowherd in your kingdom. I will guard your cattle wealth. I can cure any disease which affects cows and bulls. I am a specialist in the handling of cows. They will yield more milk if I milk them. They will be healthy and beautiful. My name is Tantripala and I have come to your kingdom since your main wealth is cattle and I feel you will give me a place in the cowshed". Virata looked at Sahadeva and said: "Whoever you may be, it looks as though you have seen better days. You do not seem to deserve this menial task. But you are welcome to Virata. I have never said 'No' to anyone who asks favours of me. As for you, you are doing me a favour by taking charge of my cattle wealth. I am very pleased with my good fortune".

Thus the five Pandavas entered the city of a king who was very good and very noble. For the first time in their exile the Pandavas were happy. They had now managed to solve their major problem. It was now only a question of time before they could emerge out of their hiding and claim the world which was theirs.

CHAPTER 4

SAIRANDHRI

Draupadi entered the city in the guise of Sairandhri. The passers-by were struck by the beauty of this woman who was dressed in such old and dirty garments. She held the strands of her long flowing hair in her right hand. A smile lit up her face. She was walking fast towards the palace of the queen. The queen of Virata was looking from the balcony of her palace. She was Sudeshna, a princess from

Kekaya. She was struck too, by the charm and personality of this woman. She saw the smile vanish from the face of the stranger. The people on the street were following her and laughing at her. The woman was terrified of their jeering and she walked faster, and the laughter grew louder. The queen was overcome with pity for the poor lonely woman who did not seem to have anyone with her. She sent for her and asked her maids to hurry up. They went to the woman who was alone in the midst of the crowd and said: "Our queen wants you to come in". Draupadi entered the palace and stood in the presence of the queen.

She still held her hair in her right hand. She now twisted it into a coil and put it behind her back. She saw the queen get up from her seat. Draupadi was still trembling because of her experience on the streets. The crowd jeering at her was an insult she had to bear. Sudeshna was very touched by the timid look in the eyes of Draupadi. She took her hand and made her sit by her side. She asked the newcomer: "You are so beautiful. How is it you are alone? Why are you not married? How could any man resist you? Why have you come to our city? Where do you come from?" Draupadi said: "My queen, I have come to you to make a living. I am an artist in the art of decorating. I was handmaiden to Draupadi, the queen of the Pandavas. I had nowhere to go since they went away to the forest. My decorations are not now needed by that poor unfortunate queen. Hearing about your good qualities I have come to you in the hope of pleasing you with my accomplishments. I hope my hopes will not be vain hopes".

The queen Sudeshna assured her that she would keep her in the palace with her and she hoped that she would be happy. She said: "You can use this palace as your own. You say that you have lived with the queen of the Pandavas. You must have enjoyed many privileges. You can use this beautiful garden of mine whenever you want to be alone with your thoughts. I can see that you have suffered a lot. Can I ask you what your troubles are?" Draupadi's tears flowed easily now. The queen took her on her lap and comforted her as she would a little child. Draupadi said: "I am Sairandhri. I have five gandharvas as husbands. They had to leave me and go away because of a curse. The curse will lift at the end of a year. I am unhappy because I have never been separated from them so far. The Pandava queen would say that we were similar even in this rare thing: having five husbands. I am sure that in a year's time my dark days will be over. I am happy I have found a sister and a mother in you".

Sudeshna was silent for a few moments. Then she said: "I have just one more thing to say. There is something that is troubling me.

You are too beautiful. My husband, the king, is very susceptible to feminine charm. What if he falls in love with you?" Draupadi said: "Please do not have that worry. I will not abuse your kindness by letting the king see me. I will always stay in the inner apartments. I will not be seen by anyone. If I am insulted, my husbands will kill the offender. I will be particularly careful that nothing happens to hurt you. You can trust me". Sudeshna was touched by the gentle and loving words of Draupadi. Draupadi said: "I have only two more requests. I will not eat food that is left over, nor will I massage the feet of others. These tasks, if performed by me, will displease my husbands". The queen said that she would never have occasion to do either of these things.

CHAPTER 5

THE WRESTLING MATCH

The queen of the Pandavas was a flower girl, Yudhishthira was a companion to Virata, Bheema was a cook, Arjuna a dancing master, Nakula was a stable boy and Sahadeva a cowherd. The freaks of Fate are indeed inscrutable. Her games are played in the most perverse ways imaginable. But, strange to say, the Pandavas were all happy, and Draupadi too. The king of Virata was a very noble king and his wife was his perfect counterpart. The princess was a delightful child. They spent the time happily in the beautiful city of Virata. Three months were over. They had only nine months more.

During the fourth month of their stay in Virata, there was celebrated in the city a great festival in honour of Sankara. The celebrations included an exhibition of wrestling. From all over the world came wrestlers to show off their prowess. The function was very impressive. The king, with all his retinue, sat there, watching the wrestling.

There was one wrestler who had come from a foreign land. He was invincible. All the wrestlers in Virata were defeated by him. He stood in the middle of the ring and called out in a loud voice: "I am the greatest wrestler in the world. There is no one who can challenge me. I am more powerful than lions and tigers". His bragging was unbearable. The king was disappointed in his own men. He said: "Is there no one here who can take up this man's challenge and teach him a lesson?" Yudhishthira sat by his side. He said: "In Indra-

prastha, when I was with King Yudhishthira I happened to see a wrestler. I have seen his technique. He is sure to defeat this man. Fortunately for us, this man is now in your palace. He is in charge of your gymnasium. You can summon him. I can assure you, he will defeat this man". Virata was pleased at the suggestion of Yudhishthira. He was happy to know that there was, in his court, someone who would uphold the reputation of Virata. He sent for Bheema.

Virata said: "Valala, Kanka tells me that he has seen you wrestling in the city of the Pandavas. He says that you can defeat this man who is challenging everyone. Please tell me if you can fight this braggart and defeat him". Bheema also saw the man standing in the middle of the ring. He could have accepted the challenge easily. But he was not for it. He was afraid his technique might be recognized. That was the reason for his standing still. But now the king had called him, and that at the suggestion of his brother Yudhishthira. Since his brother thought that it would be right, Bheema decided to fight. He said: "My lord, I can certainly fight this man and I can defeat him easily. King Yudhishthira was always praising my methods of fighting. I have been with you for so long now. You have treated me with so much affection. I will try and repay, to a small extent, your love and kindness. By the grace of lord Sankara I will defeat this man and win fame and a name for the Matsyas". Bheema prepared himself for the fight. Dressed in tights typical of a wrestler he entered the arena like an angry panther. The stadium was wild with excitement. Cheers rang from all quarters.

The fight was on. Roaring like a lion Bheema began his attack. It was a terrible fight. Bheema fought with all his might. He was eager to please the king and he did not want to let down his beloved brother who had spoken so highly of him. The sportsman in Yudhishthira could not let this man go unchallenged. That was why he had suggested the fight. It was now up to him to maintain his name and reputation. The two fighters looked like two huge rain clouds charging against each other. The spectators did not move an inch. The cheering also had stopped. So absorbed was everyone in watching this unique spectacle. They had never seen the like of it before. In the end, Bheema lifted his opponent up in the air and twirled him round and round like a wheel till he became quite giddy and finally, unconscious. Bheema then dashed him to the ground and killed him. The king was immensely pleased with the prowess of Bheema. His Virata could now boast of a wrestler who had killed the man who had, till then, been the greatest wrestler in the world.

This was the one incident in Virata which made Bheema an even greater favourite of the king than he was already. The Pandavas were

enjoying their thirteenth year of their exile. It was such a good atmosphere. In Virata they found peace which they had not had for a long time. They found affection showered on them. They had been so used to injustice and ill treatment all these days that this affection of the king was like a balm to their bruised hearts; they were happy. The months passed by very quickly. Ten months had now passed like ten days. Time passes too soon if one is happy. It lengthens itself infinitely if one is unhappy. The twelve years had seemed so long. At the end of that period the Pandavas dreaded this thirteenth year which loomed so formidably in front of them. They thought that it would be the most difficult year. But they found that it was the happiest year.

CHAPTER 6

RADHEYA'S DREAM

When Lomasa came to the earth to meet Yudhishthira he had brought a message from Indra and the message was meant for Yudhishthira alone. Indra said: "I know that there is always a dread present in your mind. It is about Radheya. You are afraid that he may kill Arjuna. Radheya is a student of Bhargava and he is a better archer than Arjuna. I will take care of that after the return of Arjuna to the earth". Yudhishthira had not told anyone about this. Indra now remembered his promise to Yudhishthira. He made up his mind that he would do something that would deprive Radheya of his power.

It was during the thirteenth year of the exile of the Pandavas. On a certain night, Radheya was sleeping on his bed which was whiter than snow. It was now midnight. The sun, full of love for his unfortunate son, visited him in his dream. He came in the guise of a brahmin. He spoke in a gentle compassionate voice to his son. He said: "Listen to me, Radheya. I will tell you something which will be for your good. You are a good, truthful man. You have taken a vow. Whoever comes to you during the middle of the day when you are worshipping the sun, will have all his wishes fulfilled. He will never be allowed to go back empty-handed. Anything he may ask will be given to him. You never say 'No' to any request. Taking advantage of this your vow, Indra, the well-wisher of the Pandavas, has decided to approach you with a request tomorrow. He will come in the guise of a brahmin. He will ask you for your Kavacha and

your Kundalas. DO NOT GIVE them to him. Your Kundalas were given to you by someone who had got it from Aditi. These are given to you as a special protection. I cannot tell you who gave them to you because I am not allowed to speak about it. When Indra asks you to give him these try to offer other things instead. Offer him your entire kingdom. Tell him that you will give anything except these two things. If the Kundalas are severed from your ears, your life will be shortened. You will die soon. The Kavacha is an armour against fate itself. With the Kavacha you are invulnerable. No one can defeat you as long as you are wearing these two. But once they are severed from your body you will be defeated and killed. They have been dipped in the nectar of immortality, the divine Amrita, the food of the gods. If you hold your life dear, you must protect these two things".

Radheya was touched by the concern in the voice of the brahmin. He said: "You are very fond of me. You can be no ordinary brahmin who can tell what will happen tomorrow. Please tell me who you are. You seem to be so concerned about my welfare. In this wide, wide world, no one has shown me so much affection except my dear mother Radha. For her I live in this world full of pain. Again, Duryodhana loves me. It is because I want to please him that I have been living on. For my part, life does not hold any attraction. I am immune to the joys and sorrows that have happened to me so far. But this your love for me makes me curious to know who the third person is, who is concerned about me".

The sun said: "I am Surya, with the thousand rays of light. I have immense affection for you. I do not want you to be duped by your enemies. That is why I came to you while the world is sleeping. Do as I say. I am talking like this so that you may live long". Radheya fell at his feet and said: "My lord, I have chosen you as my god. I do not worship any other god. You are my Ishtadaiva. I am fortunate to have seen you in person. You have come to warn me about Indra. You are my well-wisher. You want me to refuse to give up these two charms: the Kavacha and Kundalas. They mean my very life to me, you say.

"Now, I will tell you something. You are the daily witness to the vow I have taken. Everyday, when you reach the zenith, I worship you and when my worship is over, I wait for someone to ask me for alms. I grant them all that they ask for. My lord, you have been watching this ritual for years. I took up this vow when the name Sutaputra was a stigma which clung to my name. I said that I would win knowledge and fame and Punya by constant endeavour. I learnt archery from the greatest of archers. That became fruitless because of the fact that I am a Sutaputra. But this vow which I have taken,

which has brought me so much Punya, this vow has given me peace which I had not tasted for long. I am happy when I give away something. The dearer a thing is, the greater the happiness when I give it away. I am prepared to give up even my life, if I am asked to. So, tomorrow, if Indra comes to me asking me for alms, the alms which is going to be of advantage to the Pandavas, the alms which may cost me my life, do you think I will refuse him that? I have never loved this life of mine. I do not mind giving it away.

"A good name, my lord, is the only thing that I have wanted. I do not want to barter it for a long life. If I refuse to give Indra what he wants, my fame will die immediately. The name I have earned, as Radheya the giver, will die in a moment. I will live long and my ignominy will live longer. Death, with fame, is much more to be desired than a long life with ignominy. If the killer of Vritra, the lord of all the gods in the heavens, if he comes to me as a beggar, I will consider it a privilege to grant him what he wants. He may be fond of the Pandavas; he may be partial to them, in his partiality he may be tempted to take advantage of my vow and deprive me of my strength. I do not care what prompts him to do so. I know only this: I have been the chosen target of Fate. Several things have happened to me. All of them have only one thing in view: the defeat of Radheya and the success of Arjuna. I know all the conspiracies of Fate. I know that I am not meant to win. But I will not move away from the path of duty that I have set down for myself. If Indra asks me for a boon, then it will be glory for me to grant a boon to the greatest of all givers, the giver who makes the world live by his bounty.

"Fame is the woman I have chosen for my bride. I love fame more than I love my life. A man who has earned fame lives in the heavens. Infamy means annihilation. Fame puts new life into man. It makes a man feel young. It protects and guards a man like a loving mother. If I refuse to give Indra what he wants, I will live long, no doubt. But the infamy will rob me of my after-life. Fame envelops the life of man and it is the only thing permanent in this world where every thing else is transcient. It makes life on this earth pure, and it is longer than life itself. I will lose this body of mine and attain lasting life. Do you think I will forego this chance? I will fight in the war to the best of my ability. I will kill my enemies to please my dearest friend. I will obtain fame. I will die fighting and reach the heavens meant for those who die on the battle-field. I will protect my good name even at the cost of my life. I promise you, I will give Indra what he wants".

The sun said: "I love you so much, Radheya. That is why I

ask you once again not to do this foolish thing. You are giving away the happiness of your wife and your children. You are giving away the happiness of your friend who is depending on you to win this war for him. You will get fame no doubt, but what is the use of the fame which you cannot enjoy? You will be dead. The fame which you court with your life will lead you to the abode of death. When your body is burnt to ashes, when you are just a name in this world, what is the use of the fame which you have earned? You will not be here to listen to the praises that will be showered on you. You have loved me always. I have loved you too. In the name of our love I ask you this one favour. Do not give away your dear life to the Pandavas. I wish I could tell you why I am so upset at the thought of your imminent death; but I cannot. I must not tell. I can only ask you not to give away the Kavacha and the Kundalas which were placed on you by a god who loves you like his very life. Radheya, it has been the one desire in your life to kill Arjuna. You can do it only if you have these two things. If you lose them, you become vulnerable. If you do not part with the Kavacha and the Kundalas, no one, not even Indra or Rudra or Vishnu, can cause you any harm. If you want to realize your ambition to kill Arjuna, if you want to please your dear friend Duryodhana, you must not grant the boon to Indra tomorrow".

Radheya was overpowered by the love the sun had for him. He said: "My lord, you are the only god I have worshipped. I have no one whom I can call mine. I have no father. I do not know who he is. As for my mother, I do not know her either. She abandoned me as soon as I was born. I have no one who loves me. You, you, my lord, are the only person who is dear to me. In your affection for me you have come to warn me. You said to yourself: 'Radheya, my bhakta, is in danger of losing his life. I must protect him'. My lord, I do not know how to repay your kindness. You know I would do anything to please you. And yet, I am unable to obey you. I beg of you to forgive me. I have never known what fear is. I have never been afraid of death. But there is one thing that I fear most. It is UNTRUTH. I cannot be false to myself. I have to adhere to the vow I have taken: not to refuse anyone anything. I am not worried if I am asked to give up my life. I have got to grant the boon which Indra will ask me tomorrow. Please bless me with your loving hands. Please grant me lasting fame".

The sun said: "Nothing can move you from the path of righteousness. You are even greater than Yudhishthira who is the one other person who will die rather than give up Dharma. I am proud of you. When you give away your Kavacha and your Kundalas, if Indra wants you to ask a boon of him, ask him to give you his SAKTI. That will,

to a certain extent, make up for the loss of your armour". The sun disappeared from the dream of Radheya. He got up from his sleep and spent the rest of the night, reliving his dream. He could sleep no more. He was waiting for the day to dawn.

CHAPTER 7

THE BEGGING-BOWL OF INDRA

The sun rose up in the east, slowly, as though he were unwilling to usher in the day which meant the death of his son. Radheya was impatiently waiting for the sun to reach the zenith. His body was burning with a strange fever. His eyes glowed like live coals. It was midday. Radheya had finished his worship of the sun. He was waiting for the coming of Indra.

The brahmin came. Excitement made the heart of Radheya beat fast. The brahmin stood in front of him with his hands outstretched. "Please give", said the man. Radheya at once fell at his feet as was his custom. He honoured the brahmin and made him take a seat. Radheya stood before the brahmin with folded hands and said: "I will give you anything you ask for. Please ask". The brahmin said: "I do not want riches or cows or gold as other brahmins do. I want your Kavacha and your Kundalas". Radheya smiled to himself. He said: "Your request is strange. These two, my lord, cannot be removed from my body. I will give you other armours and earrings which are more costly than these. I will give you even my kingdom. But these are not to be removed". The brahmin said: "I have heard that you are the greatest of all givers. I do not want anything else. I want only these two things. If you are really as truthful and righteous as you are reputed to be, make that tradition true. Cut them away from your body and give them to me. This will be the greatest gift that you have ever given or that you will ever give hereafter. Radheya smiled all the more to himself and said: "My lord, you are evidently attracted by the glow from these things. They are not ordinary ornaments. They have been dipped in the nectar which is the food of the gods. They have been placed on me to grant me long life and to protect me from death. I have sworn to my friend Duryodhana that I will kill Arjuna in the war that is to be fought. For that, I must have this Kavacha and these Kundalas. That is the only reason why

I am asking you to let me keep them". The brahmin was adamant. He wanted these two things and would not take anything else.

Radheya laughed and said: "My lord, I know who you are. You are Indra. You are the greatest of all givers. The earth owes her life and her riches to your bounty. In fact the proverb is: 'Like Parjanya in giving'. I feel so very embarassed when *you* ask a boon of *me.* It is your privilege to grant boons to us, mortals. You are the lord of the gods. You know, more than I do, that by giving you these things which are protecting me from evil, I am giving away my very life. But that does not affect me. I am pleased and honoured that the great Indra is accepting a gift from me. I am proud to give you my life".

Radheya cut away the armour from his body. He severed the earrings from his ears. The Kavacha and Kundalas were placed at the feet of the brahmin. The face of Radheya had taken on an unusual glow. He was extremely happy to do this sacrifice for the sake of his principle. They say that the value of a sentiment is the amount of sacrifice you are prepared to make for it. Radheya was happy since he had sacrificed his very life for the sake of his Dharma. His happiness was so great that tears flowed from his eyes. Indra's eyes too were wet. Flowers from the skies rained on Radheya. Indra said: "I have never seen a person like you. You are the noblest person I have ever met. You had been told about my coming by Surya. You knew what would happen if you gave these things to me. And yet, you have given up your very life for the sake of the noble sentiments you have had all your life. Ask me anything you want. Except my personal weapon Vajra I will give you anything".

Radheya smiled and said: "My lord, to receive anything in return for a gift is not proper. It does not become a true giver. The gesture of giving loses its grace. But in this case, I have decided to ask a boon of you. I will give you the reason for it. In your affection for Arjuna and because of your partiality for the Pandavas, you have done an act which will not be approved of by anyone. You have asked me to sacrifice my life: you, the greatest giver on this earth and the heavens. You appealed to the principle I have always followed: that I will not say 'no' to anyone who asks a boon of me. To save you from the censure of the world I will ask a boon of you. My lord, I have too much respect for you to let the world talk ill of you because of this incident. So I will ask you to give me your Sakti, the weapon with which you destroyed your enemies. It will, to a certain extent, compensate for the loss of the Kavacha and the Kundalas. The world will then say: 'Indra took these two from Radheya but in return he gave

his powerful Sakti.' Thus you will escape censure from righteous-minded people. Please give me your Sakti".

Indra was amazed at the greatness of this mortal man. In a moment he had ascended to a height from where he could look down upon him, the king of the heavens. Indra said: "You have today conquered the king of the heavens. I will grant you your boon. I will also grant that there is no scar on you because of the wounds you have caused to your body by cutting away these things. You will be more glorious than you were till now. As for this Sakti, I will certainly give it to you. You can use it only against one enemy. You can use it only once. It will certainly kill the person against whom it is aimed. But it cannot be repeated. It will return to me".

Radheya said: "I need it just once, against just one person. I have just one enemy". Indra said: "I know you mean Arjuna. But so long as he is protected by Krishna no one can harm Arjuna: not even my Sakti. Krishna, the incarnation of the Lord, has taken it upon himself to protect the Pandavas. Radheya, your power will wane before his". Radheya paid no heed to his words. He was very happy to own the Sakti. He said: "I still have hopes of winning the war. I have hopes of killing Arjuna. My hopes may be dupes. But I am not worried about that. I have your Sakti. I can do my best. In spite of the loss of my Kavacha I may be able to help my friend who has centred all his hopes on me. I am happy".

Indra said: "Whether you win the war or lose it is a minor matter. You have won everlasting fame. You will be remembered by posterity as the greatest giver. From today you will be called Karna because you gave away your Kundalas. You will be called Vaikartana because you cut away your Kavacha without flinching. You will be known in the world of men as the man who could defy fate and carve a name for himself in the scrolls of Time. It is not given to everyone to be a personage like you, who will be remembered for ever and for ever. You said that the proverb is: 'Like Parjanya in giving'. Radheya, it was. From today, the proverb will be: 'Like Karna in giving'. As long as the world lives your name will be remembered. But now I must go".

Radheya fell at his feet and said: "My lord, I have one more request. Today, I have found a friend in you. You seem to like me. If you do really like me, will you do me a favour? For the last so many years I have been suffering so much because of my birth. It has been shrouded in so much mystery that I have almost lost my reason, trying to unravel the mystery. Will you reveal to me the secret of my birth? Can you tell me who I am? Who is my father? Who is my mother? Can you not put an end to my suffering?"

Indra looked at him with compassion and said: "I wish I could tell you. But it is a jealously guarded secret. You must not know it, not just yet, anyway". Radheya accepted his words with a shrug of resignation. He knew that he was powerless against fate. As if to say 'It's no matter' he brushed away the tears from his eyes and saluted Indra. Indra raised his right hand and blessed Radheya with the words: "May your name perfume posterity. Those who hear your name spoken, those who hear this story of your sacrifice, will never more swerve from the path of truth."

The heavens rained flowers on Radheya and Indra. A cool breeze blew. The earth was wet with a few drops of rain. The earth smiled. Indra disappeared. He had robbed Radheya of his life and yet he had granted him eternal life.

Chapter 8

KEECHAKA—THE BROTHER OF THE QUEEN

Draupadi was loved by the queen. She was treated almost like a queen since she had once been a companion of the queen of the Pandavas. She had gentle and very charming manners which endeared her to everyone. She passed ten months of the ajnaatavaasa in the palace of the queen of the Viratas.

The queen had a brother. His name was Keechaka. He was the commander of the king's army. He had gone out on a tour of conquests at the time when the five Pandavas entered Virata. He returned to the capital city in triumph. There was a great reception held in his honour. After it was all over Keechaka came to the apartments of his sister to visit her. He was a great favourite of his sister. He spent some time with her and returned to his palace. On his way back, he saw the gardens of Sudeshna. The trees were laden with flowers. Spring had come already. The garden was an enchanted place.

Keechaka stood for a moment, looking at the beautiful garden. Suddenly he entered it. Why should he have entered it? What made him enter? A whiff of perfume, perhaps; a flower-laden branch beckoned to him perhaps. It was Fate and nothing else which made him enter the garden and walk about among the flowers. He saw Sairandhri. He looked on her and all was light. She was beautiful. But Keechaka had known many beautiful women. Perhaps it was her

charm, her dignity, her grace. Other women had all these qualities. But Sairandhri held him in thrall.

Draupadi had gone there for a moment of peace. She would often walk there since the queen had asked her to use the garden when she wanted to be alone with her thoughts. The triumphal entry of Keechaka into the city reminded her of the entries of Bheema, Nakula, Sahadeva and Arjuna during the Rajasuya days. To shed her tears in secret Draupadi had sought refuge in the flower garden. She found suddenly that she was not alone. She turned round and found Keechaka looking at her. Looking at his love-lit eyes she fled from the spot. He went after her. He caught up with her. He said: "Who are you? I have been to the palace of my sister so often. I have never seen you before. I was amazed when I looked at you. I never knew that a woman could be so beautiful. Where have you been hiding yourself all these days? How comes it that I have not seen you before? Who are you? Why are you alone? You are wasting yourself in this place."

Draupadi did not look at him. She looked at the ground and said: "I am Sairandhri. I am your sister's flower girl. I am her servant. I have been here since a few months. Please let me go".

Keechaka said: "My sister's flower girl! You are a beautiful woman. The moment I saw you I became your slave. You are wasting yourself here. You are too good to be a servant to my proud sister. Your beauty is wasted here in a woman's apartments. Your beauty has overpowered me. I feel like a bird faint with the perfume of spring. I cannot think of anything else except you. I do not think you should dress my sister's hair. I do not think I will be able to bear it. She ought to do you that service. Why do you wear her cast-off clothes? Why do you put up with so much insult? You are born to be a queen. Come with me and be my queen. I want you. I will give up all my women. I will make them all your slaves. I will be your slave too. I will obey your slightest wish as a command. Try to be good to me. Come to me. You have found a place in my heart. You must not stay here any more. I will keep you in my palace. I will make you queen of Virata. I am the most powerful person here. The king, my brother-in-law, is king just in name. He dare not say anything. Come to my arms. Please me and you will not regret it. You cannot imagine how much I love you. I will give up anything for your sake. My good name, the reputation I have built up all these days, all these will be the incense on this new altar of love. I cannot live without you. Grant me my life". Keechaka fell at her feet and shed tears. He had become so much a woman because of his emotion.

Draupadi looked at him and said: "It is not right that you, a

prince, should talk like this to me, a maid in your sister's palace. I am too far beneath you. You can get so many women who will be your equals in rank and birth and status. You must not talk like this to me. It is wrong. I do not approve of your talk. A man should speak these words only to his wedded wife and not to other women. I am not unmarried either. I am here in your sister's palace since my husbands have asked me to stay in a place where my honour will not be in danger. I am the wife of five gandharvas. I cannot accept your proposal. If they come to know of this, my husbands will kill you. They will follow you even to the nether regions and kill you. You will not be able to escape their wrath. I feel sorry for you. That is the reason why I am telling you to stop before it is too late. Please abandon these sinful thoughts and go away. I will not tell anyone about this. I will excuse you". She turned as if to go away. Again she spoke. She said: "I am telling you once again. If you value your life leave me and go. You are wearing the noose of death on your neck thinking that it is a garland of flowers. You are trying to embrace a flame as a moth does, thinking that it is a fruit. You are trying to kill yourself, and with you, all who love you. You are a great soldier. You have won a great name and greater fame. Please do not waste all that by your madness. I warn you". Sairandhri walked away.

For a long time Keechaka stood rooted to the spot. He could not do anything. This love of his for a common flower girl was consuming him like fire. His eyes were burning. His breath came in gasps. He had to have her. Yes, he had to have her. He walked to his sister's palace. She was very surprised to see him. He had left her but a while ago. Keechaka collapsed on her bed. Sudeshna was concerned about him. She went to him and said: "What has come over you, Keechaka? You were all right when you left me. Has anything happened to you? Are you not well?" Keechaka took some time to reply. He said: "Sister, tell me, who is she, that woman who says she strings flowers for you, that beautiful woman? When did she come to you? Where did she come from? I saw her just now. I want her. I asked her to be mine but she refused. I will die if I do not have her. I never knew that love could be so painful. It hurts me. I feel as though I am burning in a rain of fire. My frame trembles when I think of her. Tell me, sister, how I can make her mine. You must help me".

Sudeshna was sorry to see her brother suffer like this. She was very fond of him. She sat by his side. She tried to pacify him. She said: "Keechaka, eleven months back she came to me asking me to give her a place in my palace. I have promised to take good care

of her. Her behaviour has been so good. She has become dear to all of us. She told me at our first meeting that she has five gandharvas for husbands. If anyone insults her they will come and kill the wrong-doer. Once, the king, my husband, happened to see her. He thought of approaching her with his intentions. I told him in soft words that what he thought would not be possible since she is guarded by her five husbands. Since then his thoughts have been just thoughts. He is afraid of the husbands. She has told me that their wrath will be more terrible than a forest fire. Keechaka, my dear brother, do not think of her any more. I have so many other maids with me. Choose any of them. I will give you anything you ask for. But do not think of Sairandhri. If you want to live, do not think of her. She will be your death. You are dear to me. Do not make me unhappy. I want you to forget Sairandhri".

Keechaka looked at her and laughed. He said: "My dear sister, after looking at Sairandhri how can I think of anyone else? She is the one woman for me. She is as radiant as fire. Her form is one huge flame and her eyes the sparks leaping out of it. Her hair! It is a cloud of smoke trying in vain to veil her brightness. Her beauty is unique. There is beggary in the language that tries to describe her. To part her beauty from her and then to describe it is to part the perfume from the Champaka blossom. You might as easily capture the brilliance of the blood-red ruby, or the cool green fire of the emerald. Sister mine, I must have her. You talk about the five gandharvas who are her husbands. What do I care about them? Am I not a warrior? I can kill a thousand gandharvas single-handed. Why then worry about five? You know nothing about women. If a woman sees a man who is handsome, strong, and who can talk beautifully, she can never resist him. Any woman. Even a woman who is faithful to her husband. This woman seems to me to be a passionate woman. She is sure to be the type who will always want her husband with her. She will be miserable without the embrace of a man. You say that she has five husbands. She has been parted from them for the last eleven months. Surely she is easy to coax! She will yield to me and my love-making. A woman like her, who is made for the act of love, will not find it easy to resist a man after months of loneliness. Her response will be wonderful. She will please me and I know that I will be able to please her. Only, I must have her to myself, alone. You must somehow manage to send her to my palace. I will take care of the rest. I will make her mine".

Sudeshna did not like this to happen to her brother. She had an instinctive fear of the future. She knew that the threats of Sairandhri were not just vain words. She knew that her brother was courting death by trying to make love to this woman. But she was sorry for him.

She wanted him to be happy. She said: "My dear Keechaka, why have you become so foolish? I know that you will be killed because of the insult you are offering to Sairandhri. I do not want my beloved brother to die. That is why I am trying to tell you all this. But I find that you are adamant. I will do what I can. You must go away now. Very soon, I will send her to you. I will ask her to bring me some wine from your palace. If you can win her, well and good. But if you cannot, I dread the future. I am afraid for you".

Keechaka hugged his sister to his heart and said: "There is no one like you, my dear sister. I will never forget this your kindness". He hurried from her palace, prodded on by Fate.

CHAPTER 9

SAIRANDHRI IN THE COURT HALL

Sudeshna waited for a day or two. By then she heard that her brother was almost ill and in bed. He was suffering agonies because of his affliction. The queen sent for Sairandhri. She said: "I hear that my brother Keechaka has brought some rare wines. I am feeling thirsty. Please go to his palace at once and bring me some wine from my brother". Draupadi was stunned. She did not dream that the queen too would become party to the evil schemes of Keechaka. A hot sigh escaped her. She said: "My queen, please do not send me there. Your brother has wrong ideas about me. He has already molested me with his advances. I do not want to go to his house. I came to you for succour. You have been protecting me for the last so many months. It is not right that you should undo all that by sending me to your brother. He will force me to obey him. I will not go there. I have no one to help me except you. Please be good to me. You are a woman. You must be kind to me, a helpless dependent. Please send someone else to the palace of your brother. Ask me to do anything else: I will gladly do it. But do not send me to the palace of Keechaka. He will insult me".

Sudeshna was furious with her. She said: "I want you to go. I do not like the manner in which you talk about my brother. He is not the type of person who will molest women. You are just thinking up something to avoid what I am asking you to do. You will not be molested by him. He knows that my maids must be treated well. Go quickly and bring me some wine. I am thirsty". Sairandhri had to

obey her. She took in her hand the vessel of gold which the queen gave her and walked to the palace of Keechaka. He had been waiting for her coming. Looking at her approaching his apartments he went to receive her. He spoke to her in a voice full of love. He said: "So you have come at last. I have been waiting for you since ever so long. Come, my beloved. It is not right that you should be standing. Look, I have prepared a bed for you. Come with me and rest there. Take me for your lover. Let us drink and enjoy this meeting of ours".

Draupadi said: "My lord, I did not come here to be with you. I was sent by my queen to bring her some wine from your palace. Please hurry and fill this bowl of gold". Keechaka laughed loudly and said: "How now, my dear woman? Now that you have come to me, do you think I will let you go so soon? I will send the wine with someone else. You stay here. Please me, and then you can go". Keechaka came near her and tried to take her hand. With a frenzy born of fear, Draupadi pushed him to the ground and tried to run away from there. She ran in the direction of the court of Virata. Yudhishthira was there and she wanted his protection. Dropping the bowl of gold to the ground she ran as fast as she could. Keechaka ran behind her. He grabbed her hair and threw her on the floor. He kicked her with his foot. Draupadi was desperate. With her hair floating behind her like a cloud she ran to the court of Virata.

The king looked at her. Yudhishthira looked at her. No one spoke a word. Bheema had come there by chance. He took one look at the scene. His eyes burned like fire. He breathed fire. He would have killed Keechaka on the spot. He began to uproot a tree that was near at hand. But Yudhishthira stopped him with a look. He said: "If you want firewood for your oven do not break the branches from this tree. The wood will be too green. It will not burn. It is no use venting your energy on the tree. When the tree is dry enough you can destroy the offending tree. The time is not ripe enough." Bheema understood what he meant. They should not spoil the future by hasty actions. He must wait. Bheema looked at the earth and stood silent.

Draupadi saw all this. She was furious with Yudhishthira. She looked at the king and said: "My lord, how can you allow this to happen in your kingdom? I have come to you for protection. You must protect me from this man who is harassing me. I have five husbands but they are not able to punish this man. They are silent. You are the king. There is no refuge but you. You must save me from ruin. I appeal to you". The king was silent. He could not do anything. The powerful Keechaka was the commander of his army. He could not afford to antagonise him. He did not dare to speak harshly to

him. No one could do anything else but watch the entire proceedings. The king said: "I cannot pass judgement on something which did not happen in my presence. I saw only the end of it. Unless I know that the fault is entirely that of Keechaka I cannot do anything. How do I know what provoked him to kick you? Perhaps he was justified. I do not know. Please go away from here".

Yudhishthira was furious with the king for the spineless manner in which he tried to avoid the issue. His brow was wet with sweat. He had to control his anger. He addressed his dear wife and said: "I think it will be better if you go back to the apartments of the queen. Your husbands are sure to be aware of all that has happened so far. They are no doubt angry. They do not leap to your rescue since they perhaps think that the time is inopportune. It is not right that you should be angry with them because they did not hurry to your side to help you. Your husbands think that this is not the time to be angry. Please be patient. The time will come when all your troubles will be over. They do not come now because they do not want their long penance of the past so many years to go waste. They do not want to do the penance again. They expect you to co-operate with them and put up with this trouble for just fifteen days more. You can then leave this city and go to your husbands. They will then be free to do as you please. You know that they are under a curse. That curse is to lift in a fortnight's time".

Draupadi would not move from there. Yudhishthira once again remonstrated with her and said: "King Virata is a righteous man. It is not right that you should consider him unjust. You weep too much in the presence of men. It is not modest. Go back to the palace quarters. Your behaviour is exaggerated like that of an actress. You must not stay too long here". Draupadi was touched to the quick by the word "actress". She looked at Yudhishthira with burning eyes and said: "You are right, wise man. You call me an actress. You have every right to say that. But let me tell you something. Since my first husband is a dice addict, my other husbands have to be cowards because of him".

Draupadi pushed the hair back from her face. She set her garments right. With a look of fire at the court in general and at Yudhishthira in particular, she strode out of the court. The Pandavas, who were ready to lay down their lives for her sake, had to keep silent and to keep their bravery and their anger hidden since they had to prevent their identities from being known.

CHAPTER 10

BHEEMA AND SAIRANDHRI

Draupadi returned to her apartments. She bathed herself. She gave way to her weeping. She sobbed as if her heart would break. Sudeshna came to her and sat near her. She said: "Why do you weep so? What makes you so unhappy?" Draupadi was angry with her. She said: "Knowing what would happen, you sent me to your dear brother's palace. And now you ask me why I am weeping". She would not speak for a long time. Then she told the queen all that happened. She said: "I am not worried. My husbands now know everything. They will kill your brother in no time". Sudeshna left her and went away, her heart full of fear for her brother's life.

Draupadi sat there alone: how long, she knew not. She could feel only one thing: HATRED. She hated this Keechaka. She decided that he should die. That he had dared to look at her! That was insult enough. He had to die. She was a flame. She would consume him. She would not eat. She would not sleep. She spent hours thus. At last she decided on the course of action.

That night when everyone had gone to sleep Draupadi got up from her bed and walked with determined steps towards the place where Bheema slept. She entered his sleeping quarters. He was there, sleeping. Draupadi went and sat by his side. She looked at him for a long time. She roused Bheema from his sleep. He got up and sat on the bed. She spoke to him in a voice as sweet as the notes of the Veena. She looked at him with love and said: "Bheema, my dear Bheema, how can you sleep when I am spending my nights and days in pain? Are you also as hard-hearted as your brother? How can you sleep as long as Keechaka is alive? How can you let me suffer and sleep as though nothing has happened? You are the only person to whom I can appeal. Bheema, please make me happy". Bheema said: "This is a rash thing you have done. If anyone sees you in my bed, your reputation and mine will go. You should not have come here. Tell me quickly why you have come. Go away before anyone discovers our acquaintance".

Draupadi sat silent for a while. Then suddenly she began to talk. She spoke to Bheema about how Keechaka had been harassing her. She told him everything. He listened to the whole recital. She continued and said: "You were there in the court. You heard how Yudhishthira talked. How can I go to him for help? I have no respect

for him. He has no self-respect. He has no feelings. He can only gamble. He can do nothing else. You have always done anything I have wanted you to do. You love me. I can appeal to you and to no one else. I cannot eat and I cannot sleep until Keechaka is killed. I cannot ask Yudhishthira. I cannot approach our Arjuna either. Both Nakula and Sahadeva are lost in their brother. They will never do anything which will displease Yudhishthira. Only *you* will defy him and do what will please me. I have come to you for help. I have been suffering so much for the past so many months. I have never done menial service to anyone till now. But today, I have to grind perfumes into paste for the king and queen. Look at my hands. You remember how they used to be. Now look at them. Look at the corns that have been formed on my palm because of this constant grinding".

Draupadi held out her hands to him. He saw her lovely hands. He saw her pink palms rough and coarse with corns. He put her two hands on his face and wept tears of pain. He then composed himself and said: "Listen to me, my dearest Draupadi. You know how much I love you. Have I ever refused you anything? But this time we must be patient. I would have killed Keechaka in the sabha today but for the timely advice of Yudhishthira. I understood what he meant. I am also not very happy as you seem to think. Do you think I have forgotten what has happened these few years? Do you think I have forgotten the court in Hastinapura? I am also counting the days when our freedom will dawn. We have to be very careful, my queen. The time of our hiding is drawing to a close. Half a month more, and then I will kill Keechaka. I must not do anything rash now. If I kill him now I will be recognized. We will have to go to the forest again if that happens. To avert that I am asking you to be patient for just a few days more. Did not Seeta, the beloved wife of Sree Rama, bear her troubles with great patience? Think of Damayanti. Think of the many queens who bore pain with patience. I promise you, I will kill Keechaka. It is not a difficult task for Bheema who has killed Baka and Hidimba. I am only telling you that the time is not ripe enough. Please put up with these things for a fortnight more, just a fortnight. Then I will grant you your heart's desire. When our exile is over we can come out into the open. I will challenge Keechaka to single combat and kill him, but not now. Yudhishthira has asked me to be patient".

Draupadi refused to be convinced. She said: "I did not know that you would be so heartless. I have no one now. The only way is death. If you do not kill Keechaka I promise you I will drink poison and kill myself". Bheema was sorry for her. He made up

his mind to do what she wanted him to do. He took her in his arms. He wiped her tears with gentle fingers and said: "Do not weep, Draupadi. Do not weep, my queen. I cannot bear to see you cry. I will kill Keechaka. I will kill him tomorrow. You must meet him tomorrow and tell him that you will meet him in the dance hall which the king has built now. Tell him that there is a bed there and that you will meet him in the night. Make him come there. I will meet him and kill him. Are you satisfied? Please look happy".

For the first time that night, Draupadi smiled. She said: "I will do it, Bheema. I am happy now. You are the only brave and loving husband I have. I am grateful to God for giving you to me". Draupadi left him and walked cautiously back to her apartments.

In the morning Keechaka came to Draupadi and said: "Did you see what happened in the court yesterday? The king is afraid of me. He cannot control me. There is no one here who will listen to your appeal. You must make up your mind and become my wife soon". Draupadi smiled a sweet smile. Keechaka could not believe his eyes. She said: "I refused you so long because I am afraid of my husbands. I was afraid that they will kill me and you if they come to know of this. I have averted their suspicion, I think. It is now safe for me to come to you. I have found a solution. If you promise not to tell anyone about it I will suggest a place of meeting which will not be known to anyone. You know the new dance hall that has been built by the king. The girls will be there during the daytime. At night they go away to their homes. It will be empty. I know that there is a bed there. If you come there, alone, tonight, I will be there waiting for you. But remember, no one, NO ONE, should know about this tryst of ours. There, in the hall, tonight, I will give you what you deserve".

Keechaka was crazy with love for her. He was so happy at the thought of having this woman. He agreed to all that she said. He said: "Certainly! I will come alone. No lover will confide to anyone about his tryst with his beloved. I am grateful to you for being so kind to me. I will be at the dance hall at the time you suggest". He went away. Draupadi managed to meet Bheema and tell him that tonight was to be THE NIGHT. Then she sat and waited impatiently for the night to come. Three pairs of eyes were waiting for the end of the day. A moment seemed like a year to all of them.

CHAPTER 11

THE DANCE HALL—THE TRYSTING PLACE

It was nearing midnight. Covering himself with a soft piece of silk like a woman, Bheema stole out of the kitchen. Draupadi was waiting for him. Together they went silently to the dance hall. In the darkness they felt their way to the couch. Bheema lay himself down. Draupadi stood behind a pillar. They were waiting. Keechaka had been waiting too impatiently for the night to come. He spent all the time adorning himself. The day seemed so long to this victim of fate. Keechaka was handsome. But today he looked more handsome than ever. His handsomeness was like the final glory of a lamp that is just about to be extinguished.

Keechaka entered the dance hall. In the darkness lit up only by the starlight that was filtering in through the immense windows, Keechaka walked towards the couch. He saw a form lying down on it. He hurried towards the couch. He went near. He said: "After all, you have agreed to be mine. I am happy. My dear woman, if you only knew what torture it has been for me to wait for the night to come! I have hated the sun today as I have never hated before. Look at me! All the women whom I saw today say that I am looking extremely handsome. They do not know that it is my joy which has given me this beauty. I am dying for you. Please do not delay any more. Take me in your arms." Keechaka went near the couch and took the hand that was stretched out towards him. His was hot with desire. Keechaka found his hands grasped firmly. Like a flash of lightning it came to his mind that this was no woman's hand. It was the firm grip of a man's hand. He saw the form rising slowly out of the couch. It was not a woman.

Before he could think, he heard Bheema's voice. Bheema said: "So you think you are more handsome today than you were all these days. You must be. Because you are going to meet the woman who has fallen in love with you. She is DEATH. She has been courting you for this many a day and you have refused to take her in your arms. She came to me and asked me to help her to get her man. Here I am. Do not think that Sairandhri spoke vain and empty words when she said that her gandharvas are terrible like the thunderbolt of Indra. I am one of her husbands. Come, fight with me and reach the abode of death." Bheema jumped off the couch. He grabbed the perfumed hair of Keechaka and pushed him to the ground.

The fight was on. Bheema caught Keechaka in his mighty arms and tried to strangle him. They wrestled for their lives. Both made animal noises. Each was bent on killing the other. Like two tigers in the forest they roared at each other. Keechaka tripped up Bheema with his knees and felled him to the ground. But Bheema was undaunted. He rose up and resumed the fight. Bheema was stronger than Keechaka. His anger and fury doubled his strength. Keechaka was not prepared for the sudden attack in the dance hall. He was weak with desire. His knees had become weak. He had been deceived by a woman who had pretended to love him. Keechaka had had sleepless nights. His mind had not been functioning properly for the last few days ever since he saw Sairandhri in the palace gardens. Poor Keechaka could not fight as well as he would have done if circumstances had been different.

Bheema caught up the poor unfortunate Keechaka in his arms. He pushed him to the ground. He placed his knees on his chest. With his strong powerful hands, which had the strength of elephants, Bheema caught hold of the neck of Keechaka and slowly strangled him. Keechaka could not escape this death grip. He was being slowly crushed. Life was slowly expelled out of his body. He gasped for breath. He beat against the powerful frame of Bheema. But Bheema was ruthless. All the anger and fury of Bheema were concentrated in the grip which held Keechaka. A few moments of futile struggle, and Keechaka was dead.

Bheema's anger was not yet appeased. Like a beast, he kicked at the dead body of Keechaka. He pummelled his body till the arms and legs were crushed out of shape. He pushed them into the body and the handsome head of Keechaka too. Keechaka was just a lump of flesh. Bheema brought a torch and he showed the body of Keechaka to Draupadi. He said: "Look, my queen, I have killed him. Are you happy now?" Draupadi's eyes were wild with joy. She looked like death itself in the form of a woman. Bheema put out the torch and told Draupadi that he would now go back to his apartments. He slipped quietly out of the dance hall.

Draupadi was alone there. Her happiness was great. She summoned the guards of the dance hall. She told them: "Look at the fate of this man. He tried to molest me. I warned him about the wrath of my gandharva husbands. But he heeded me not. Now Keechaka has been killed by my husband. Come and look". They brought many torches and entered the hall. What they saw struck terror into their hearts. They rushed out announcing to everyone that the powerful Keechaka had been killed brutally by the gandharva husband of Sairandhri. The hall became filled up in a moment. The relatives and the hundred and five half-brothers of Keechaka hurried to the place.

The queen and the king came there and shed tears at the sight of Keechaka.

The funeral rites were begun in the morning. They placed the body of Keechaka on the pall and the brothers of Keechaka—Upakeechakas by name—were about to take the body to the burning ground. They happened to see Draupadi standing there, clinging to a pillar and watching the proceedings. Their anger against her was terrible. They said: "It is because of this woman that our dear brother is dead. He wanted her. Let him have her. Let us put her also on the funeral pyre and burn her along with our brother. That will please his soul". They approached Virata with the request that he should grant them permission to burn Sairandhri along with Keechaka. The king did not dare to say 'No' to the powerful brothers of Keechaka. He allowed this act. The Upakeechakas caught Draupadi and tied her up. They placed her on the bier. They said: "It is but right that you should go with your lover. It is not right to forsake him because he is dead. You must follow him to the abode of Yama where you have sent him".

Draupadi set up a wail that could be heard all over the palace. She said: "Oh my husbands, Jaya, Jayesha, Vijaya, Jayatsena, Jayadbala, please come and help me. These brothers of Keechaka are carrying me to the burning grounds. They are trying to burn me along with Keechaka. Where are you, my dear husbands? Please rescue me from this fate". Her voice reached the ears of Bheema. He shouted back and said: "I am here. I have heard you. I will take care of you". Bheema was in a terrible predicament. When he killed Keechaka it was night. He could then come out in the dark without being noticed by anyone. But now it was broad daylight. But he had to go. He leaped the wall of the palace and rushed towards the burning grounds. by a shorter route. He reached the place before the funeral procession arrived there. He had uprooted a tree already. He attacked the Upakeechakas. He had to finish the work before he could be recognized by anyone. Bheema fought desperately. His fury gave him new strength. He struck at all of them. They had not expected anything of the kind. They did not know that they would be attacked. This surprise attack was too much for them. On top of that they had a feeling that they were not fighting with a mortal man. They were afraid. Bheema killed everyone of them. The burning ground was now strewn with the bodies of the brothers of Keechaka. Bheema undid the ropes which bound Draupadi. He asked her to go back to the palace. He went back to his apartments. He bathed himself and went about his work as though nothing had happened.

The city was terrified because of the events that took place. Every-

one looked at Sairandhri as though she were something dreadful. The king told his wife: "This woman is too beautiful. Looking at her, all men are overcome with love for her, and then her husbands come and kill these unfortunate men. I am afraid it is too dangerous to have her in our kingdom. You must tell her that you cannot keep her here any longer and that she has to look elsewhere for a home". Sudeshna went to her palace and summoned Draupadi to her presence. She said: "Sairandhri, you can go wherever you please. You are too lovely. We are afraid to have you with us. You spell death to everyone. I have lost my dear brother because of you and my hundred and five step brothers too. You are a cruel-minded woman. You have abused the love I gave you. You have behaved ungratefully towards me. I gave you a home when you needed one. You can go back to the gandharvas you talk about. I cannot have you with me any longer".

Draupadi said: "My queen, I am sorry I have caused you unhappiness. I tried my best to avert this tragedy. I told you so many times that the consequences would be like this. But you would not listen nor would your brother. But please bear with me for thirteen days more: just thirteen days. The curse under which my husbands are labouring will lift in thirteen days. I will then leave you and go away. I am talking for the good of you and your king. The gandharvas will be grateful to the king for his kindness and yours. I know that the sight of me is hateful to you who loved your brother dearly. I know that I am not loved by anyone here. But just for thirteen days more, please put up with my presence. You will be glad about this later, believe me". Sudeshna had to agree to the appeal of the woman. She said: "You are too powerful. We are helpless in your hands. I am appealing to you for help. Please do not make your husbands destroy us. I love my husband. My happiness is in your hands. You must protect us". Sudeshna wiped her tears with her mantle and walked away from the chamber.

Chapter 12

THE ASSEMBLY IN HASTINAPURA

The spies of Duryodhana had been sent to all the countries to find out the hiding place of the Pandavas. Their search was fruitless. They returned one by one to Hastinapura. Duryodhana was there surrounded by his brothers, Radheya, Drona, Bheeshma and the Trigarta

brothers. The spies said: "My lord, we searched for the Pandavas all over the world. They cannot be found anywhere. We looked for them in all the forests. They were not to be found. We went to Dwaraka and looked there. We could not find them. Nor did the people talk as if they knew about the Pandavas. They are not in Panchala either. We have a feeling that they are dead. You can enjoy this world without any rivals. During our tour round the world we heard a piece of news that is the topic of conversation everywhere. It will interest you. You must remember Keechaka, the commander of the army of the Matsyas. Keechaka had defeated these Trigartas, you remember. Keechaka was killed by some unknown person in the middle of the night. They say that it is because of a woman that he met with his death. His brothers, the Upakeechakas too, were killed by this same gandharva who is said to be the husband of the woman. That is the only piece of news we could gather. As for the Pandavas, there is no trace of them. There is no evidence that they are alive. They seem to have vanished from the face of the earth".

Duryodhana dismissed them from his presence after rewarding them for their trouble. He pondered for a moment. Then he spoke: "We must try again to find out where they have gone. We realize that the time is very short. In a few days more the time of their exile will be over and they will come out into the open. We must discover their hiding place. If we do not succeed they will come and claim their kingdom. We must send spies who are more efficient. Perhaps they are dead, as the spies say. Then it will be excellent".

Drona got up and said: "Do not entertain such vain hopes, Duryodhana. People like Yudhishthira and his brothers cannot die an early death. They will be long-lived. Why are you so keen on finding out their hiding place? You sent them to the forest by unfair means. You have enjoyed their wealth for thirteen years now. Why do you not wait for the end of the year? When they come back and claim their kingdom, why should you not give it back to them? If you do that, yours will be undying fame".

Drona's speech was followed by that of Bheeshma. He said: "What the Acharya said is right. The Pandavas cannot be destroyed. They cannot be dead. I know that my advice will not please you or your father. Still I will speak. What is the use of wasting one's breath by saying a thousand things? I will sum it all up in one sentence: 'Where there is Dharma, there is victory'. My child, you are just burning up your energy trying to find out where they are. I will give you a clue. Where Yudhishthira lives, the place will be more fruitful. There will be no place for envy, for rude speech or for ire, in the land where Yudhishthira lives. The people will be god-fearing. They will

all be like Yudhishthira. The rains will be regular there. The land will have an excellent harvest, the land where Yudhishthira dwells. The flowers will smell sweeter for his presence. The fruits will be more juicy and more luscious because of the presence of Yudhishthira. The cows will yield sweeter milk where Yudhishthira dwells. There will always be a festive air in the land where Yudhishthira dwells. So, if you want to find out where the Pandavas are hiding, send out your spies to look for a country which has all the glories that I have mentioned. I have just one more word to say.

"The words I spoke till now were those of a courtier in the presence of his king. But now, as the grandfather of the young king, I will say a few words.

"Duryodhana, you have ever been dear to me. I have been partial to you even when I knew that you were in the wrong. But now, listen to me. The Pandavas have suffered enough. You are a prince. You have a princely nature. You can be very magnanimous if you wish to. Why should you not decide to return to them their kingdom? You are not a young man any more; nor are they. The days of your lusty youth are gone. Why not let the last few years pass in peace? Age, they say, softens the minds of people. Can you not let this feud end with the end of the thirteen years? Why do you destroy yourself?"

Duryodhana did not like his talk. He frowned and said: "No, grandfather, it can never be. I cannot give up my hatred for the Pandavas. They are my enemies. I will not return their kingdom to them. I will move heaven and earth to find out where they are hiding and I will send them again to the forest for another twelve years".

Kripa spoke. He said: "Duryodhana, you have decided to commit suicide. That is evident to all of us. The time has come when the Pandavas will emerge out of their eclipse. You say that you have decided not to give them back their kingdom. You have decided on war, evidently. In which case, the only thing to do is to collect your army even from now. Find out who your friends are. Find out who will support you in the war that is imminent. The angry Pandavas will be like highly venomed serpents. They will not spare you. You must begin your preparations even from now. Time is short. You must meet the many kings personally and ask them to side with you. You must get promises from each of your friends that he will stand by you in your hour of need. You will need all their help and much more too, if I know the Pandavas".

Duryodhana saw the logic of Kripa's arguments. He sat silent for a long time. Suddenly he sat up. He sent for the spies who had

come just some time back. He made them recount to him in detail the death of Keechaka. They gave him the entire story. Duryodhana dismissed them. After a few moments of thinking he said: "Yes. It must be that. It is known all over the world that there are, on the face of this earth, four people who are greater than Indra himself in strength, in prowess, in bravery, and in the power of physique. They are just four. I will give you their names: they are Balarama, Bheema, Salya and Keechaka. There is no fifth. These four vie with each other in all these qualities. They are equally matched in everything. We have arrived at the conclusion that the Pandavas are alive since Bheema is alive. We know that Bheema is alive since it stands to reason that Keechaka was killed by Bheema. No one else could have killed Keechaka. Consider the facts. Just a year back, there comes to the palace of the queen of the Matsyas a strange woman who talks about her five gandharva husbands. Anyone with a particle of sense would have guessed that this woman, this Sairandhri, was Draupadi and no one else. Draupadi is indeed a beautiful woman. There is no denying it. We all know Keechaka. He never could resist a beautiful woman. He has tried to make love to this serpent in human form. She has instigated Bheema to kill Keechaka, in the guise of a gandharva. Nothing else can explain the death of the great Keechaka. Who can kill Keechaka in personal combat without the use of even weapons? It can only be Bheema. And again, think of the way he has been killed. His arms and legs were pushed into his chest and his chin too. Can you not recognize the technique of our beloved cousin there? It is typical of Bheema. He is fond of this technique. This midnight meeting in the dance hall and the secret killing all show that secrecy was the watchword: secrecy was essential. The woman and Bheema were in great fear of being recognized. Hence this dastardly killing of a credulous man in love with a monster. Poor unfortunate Keechaka!"

Duryodhana spoke again. He said: "Now that I come to think of it, all the descriptions which our dear grandfather gave of the country where Yudhishthira dwells, fit this kingdom of Matsya. I gathered as much from the garrulous spies who spoke about it. We have found out the hiding place of our dear cousins. It is Virata. The Pandavas are living there in disguise. Let us go immediately to the Matsya country and invade it. We will take all their cattle wealth. When the king is in danger, the Pandavas are sure to fight for their friend. We will smoke them out of their holes, where they are hiding like rats. Once they are recognized before the expiry of the thirteenth year we can send them back to the forest for another twelve years. Our mind is made up. Please make all preparations for attacking Matsya. This

is our suggestion. If there is a better proposal, our ears are bent to listen".

Susarma, the king of the Trigartas, who had been conferring with Radheya and Dussasana, now spoke. He said: "My lord, I have always had a grievance against this Matsya kingdom. With the help of Keechaka, the Kekaya brothers and Salva, the Matsya king has been able to defeat me again and again. Now that Keechaka is dead, it will be easy for me to invade the kingdom and capture all the cattle wealth of the king. His kingdom is indeed rich. The king of Virata is now absolutely helpless, since Keechaka his commander is dead. I want to join you in your expedition against the Matsya kingdom. I will be of immense help to you in this attempt of yours against Virata".

Radheya said: "Susarma's words are true. If I may make a suggestion, let us divide our combined army into two and invade the enemy's country from two different directions. We can then be sure of victory".

Duryodhana listened to the words of both of them. He said: "Dussasana, collect our army. There is very little time. Let our revered grandfather, Kripa, Drona and Aswatthama lead our army. Radheya and myself, with Sakuni, will of course be there, and you too with our other brothers. Let Susarma with his army go there tomorrow and attack them. Let him take away all their cattle. His attack will be on the southern side of Virata. The king, of course, will defend his cattle. The Pandavas will come to his aid. We, the Kauravas, will reach the outskirts of the city. On the day next to the Trigarta attack, we will go and collect the cattle from the northern side of the city. We can be sure of success in both our endeavours: the conquest of the Matsya kingdom, the gain of his cattle wealth and the unmasking of the Pandavas. So, it is decided that Susarma attacks Virata on the eighth day after the new moon: we attack on the ninth day. Let us now dissolve the council".

The council hall emptied itself. The preparations for the invasion into Virata began with feverish haste. Susarma went to his city to collect his army. There was excitement in the heart of everyone.

CHAPTER 13

VIRATA'S COWS STOLEN!

The cows of Virata were being stolen. The cowherds were not able to protect them. The onslaught was so sudden. Under their very eyes the cows were being taken away. They could do nothing. They were powerless against the rain of arrows and javelins which were hurled at all of them. They left the cowsheds and ran to the court of the king. They cried out: "My lord, please come to our rescue. Enemies have entered the city and they have taken away all the cows from the sheds". Immediately the king collected a huge army and began to march in pursuit of the offenders. It was a very big army. Elephants, horses, chariots and footmen made up the immense army. The king had his brothers to help him. Sataneeka was one. Madiraswa was the second and Suryadatta was the third. The eldest son of Virata, by name Veeresanka, prepared himself to help his father. Dressed in magnificent coats of mail, they all set out to fight with the enemy.

When the horses were being brought for the king's chariot, Yudhishthira came to the king and said: "Among my several accomplishments, fighting is one. I know how to fight in a chariot or on horseback. This cook of yours, this Valala, is a very great fighter. Also these two men who are here to guard your horses and your cows. If you will allow it, we will all prepare ourselves to fight with your enemy and help you". The king was glad to have the help of these men. He called Sataneeka and said: "Get chariots and weapons for these four men. Kanka says that they are good fighters. Please hurry up and equip them for the fight". They were all ready. Yudhishthira felt that he was doing the right thing. It was but right that they should repay the kindness of the king who had given them a home for the last so many months; he also knew that the king would need their help since the enemy was Susarma, the Trigarta. His fame was great. Yudhishthira had heard about him from Arjuna. The army left the city and proceeded towards the field.

The fighting began. The Trigarta brothers were powerful fighters. If Keechaka had been alive he would have routed their army in no time. But without him the king found the enemy to be formidable. The field was already strewn with the bodies of the dead soldiers. It was fortunate that the four Pandavas had offered to help Virata. They fought like forest fires. Wherever they went, destruction followed in their wake. It was a surprise to Susarma that Virata was offering so

much resistance to his onslaught. He was amazed at the excellent way in which the Matsya army was fighting.

Yudhishthira had taken charge of the entire army. He arranged it as a phalanx in the shape of an eagle. He occupied the head of the bird; Nakula and Sahadeva were the guards for the wings and Bheema was at the tail. In this manner they were able to attack the enemy very effectively. Thousands of soldiers were killed by Yudhishthira. Bheema killed double the number of soldiers. The twins were even more terrible. Nakula's victims were three times Yudhishthira's and Sahadeva's four. Sataneeka was excited at the excellent help the Pandavas were giving him and he fought well. Virata was proceeding fast, cutting his way into the army like a sickle working its way into a field of corn. He met Susarma. A duel was fought between these two. The battle-field was covered by the dust rising from the ground. The dust almost hid the sun. The entire field became dark because of it. In the sudden darkness that fell on the field, Susarma, the Trigarta, took the Matsya king captive. Virata's bow was broken into two. He was helpless. When he was thus rendered helpless, Virata was carried bodily out of his chariot and away to the chariot of Susarma. The darkness lifted. The soldiers saw their king captured. There was panic in the ranks. All of them began to run away from the field of battle.

Yudhishthira saw what had happened. He told Bheema: "The king has been captured by Susarma. He thinks that the king is helpless. I want you to go to Virata's rescue". Bheema said: "Surely, that fool does not imagine that the king is helpless! Of course I will go and rescue the king". Bheema saw a tree nearby and tried to uproot it. Yudhishthira smiled and said: "Please, Bheema, do not do that. We are not supposed to be recognized. If you use your technique I am sure Susarma will know who you are. Please fight like others do and do your task. Leave that tree alone!" Bheema laughed loudly and said: "You are right, my lord. I will go now". Bheema and his brothers Nakula and Sahadeva ascended their chariots and proceeded fast in the wake of Susarma. Yudhishthira followed them. The four of them challenged the Trigarta. Seeing the four warriors, Virata fought with new vigour. Lifting up his mace, Virata fought with Susarma in the chariot itself. Before the winking of an eyelid Bheema had jumped into the chariot of Susarma, the Trigarta.

Bheema said: "You have been harassing our king and our cattle. You have wounded the poor innocent people who were guarding the cattle. Without any reason or any provocation you have waged war on the Matsyas. Why should I not kill you for this?" Bheema defeated him easily. He made Susarma unconscious and he bound him hand and foot. He released Virata. He carried Susarma to his own chariot,

and brought him before Yudhishthira. Yudhishthira laughed at his victim and told Bheema: "Release the sinner". But Bheema would not do so. He said: "Susarma, if you have any desire to live then you must admit in front of all the people, your soldiers and ours, that you are the slave of our king. That is the etiquette of war and you must follow the rules". Yudhishthira smiled at his brother and said: "No, do not keep on insulting him. He has become a slave already since he has been defeated. Do not humiliate him by asking him to admit it. Release him". Susarma went away from their presence, his face burning with shame. The cattle had been regained. The enemy had been routed. Virata was very pleased with the four Pandavas. They spent the night in the tents pitched on the battle-field.

Virata could not find words enough to praise Yudhishthira. He said: "I do not know how I am going to repay you for your help. It was you four who won the war for me today. I would have been the victim of Susarma but for your timely interference. I will give you all that I own. Tell me how I can repay you".

Yudhishthira said: "I am glad we have been of some help to you. What we did was but our duty. You have helped us all these months and this was just our way of showing our gratitude. You do not have to repay our 'kindness' as you are pleased to call it. We did nothing remarkable". Virata was not satisfied. He wanted to give them everything he had. He said: "When I think of the valour of Valala, words fail me. I must reward him". Yudhishthira spoke sweet words and asked the king to send messengers to the city announcing the victory of the king. He sent word too to make arrangements for the triumphal entry of the king into the city. They spent a very happy night on the battle-field. They decided to leave for the city after the sun had risen.

Chapter 14

UTTARA KUMARA—THE YOUNG PRINCE

On the day following the Trigarta attack, as per their programme, the Kauravas attacked the city from the northern side. They came and captured the cows. The cowherds, taken by surprise, could not defend the cows and rushed to the palace and told their story to the people there. They entered the palace and went right in. There they found no one except the younger son of Virata, by name Bhoominjaya. He was better known as Uttara Kumara. The cowherds went to him and

told him about the havoc that had been caused by the onslaught of the Kauravas. They said: "Your father has gone to fight the Trigarta army. You must now come to our rescue and help us to recover our cows. Please prepare yourself for the fight. Please do not be late. The enemies have already gone quite some distance. You will have to overtake them and bring the cows back for us. The king thinks that you are a worthy son of a worthy father. Please come at once. You are engaged in playing the Veena. Keep it away from you. Take up the Veena called the bow and play sweet music on the strings of the bow and put fear into the hearts of your enemies with your music. Please hurry".

The prince was sitting in the midst of the women of the royal household. He spoke now. He said: "Certainly! I will go at once and attack the enemies. I will take up my mighty bow and destroy the entire host of the Kauravas. But just at the moment I am in a terrible predicament. I have no charioteer fit enough to steer my horses through the ranks of the enemies. You all must know that half the battle is won because of a good charioteer. Without him, there is every chance of my losing the battle. He must be a capable person. He must be used to drive the chariots of heroes like me. My own charioteer was killed recently in the great war I fought for twenty-eight days and nights together. I ask of you all to get me a good charioteer immediately. I do not care about the enemies. If I have a good charioteer I can tackle Bheeshma, Drona, Kripa, Aswatthama and Radheya single-handed. That does not worry me in the least. I can fight with the Kauravas as Indra fought Vritra. I can kill all of them. I will rescue the cows in a moment. People who see me fighting will say: 'Is it Arjuna? There is no one else who can fight so well'. I am confident of that. Please arrange for a good charioteer at once".

Draupadi was there with the other women. She heard his words. She could not bear to hear the bragging of the prince and his talking of himself as the equal of Arjuna. Arjuna looked at her anger and smiled to himself. He managed to get a few moments alone with her. He said: "I saw your anger and I thank you for it, my sweet queen. Go now to Uttaraa, the princess, and tell her that in his fight with Indra during the burning of the Khandava forest, Arjuna's charioteer was Brihannala. Tell her that she can go and tell her brother about this. Tell her all about the greatness of Brihannala. Ask her to suggest me as a charioteer for the prince. We will see what he does after that". Draupadi did as she was told. She went to Uttaraa, the princess, and said: "Your brother says that he cannot fight since he thinks that he has no one good enough to steer his horses. I know of one who

can do it for him. Brihannala is a good charioteer. I know that she was the charioteer to Arjuna himself when he fought with Indra during the burning of the Khandava forest. That was why Arjuna was able to defeat Indra. I know about the prowess of Brihannala. If she takes the reins of your brother's horses in her hands no one can defeat your brother. All, all the enemies, will be defeated. All the Kauravas, Devas and Gandharvas will easily be vanquished. You can be sure of that. Please tell your brother to take Brihannala".

The princess was very happy. She rushed to her brother and said: "My dear brother, you can get ready for the fight. I have secured a charioteer for you. Sairandhri tells me that our dance teacher, Brihannala, is a good charioteer. Sairandhri says that Arjuna won the fight with Indra with Brihannala as his charioteer. Hurry up, brother, get ready". Uttara Kumara summoned Sairandhri to his presence. She told him all about Brihannala. She rained praises on her. The prince said: "Brihannala is neither a man nor a woman. How can I, a pure kshatriya, have a woman for a charioteer? I do not think it is right. It will be beneath my dignity if I have a woman to steer my horses. I will have to give up the idea of fighting".

Sairandhri said: "You may be right. But in an emergency like this you must not think too closely on these small matters of etiquette. Your father has gone out to fight. During his absence this emergency has arisen. It is up to you, a real kshatriya, to conduct yourself as a worthy son of a worthy father. These small matters should not be remembered at a time like this. Please summon your charioteer Brihannala to your presence".

Uttara Kumara had to agree to this. His sister was standing by his side, proud of him and his imminent fight with the Kuru army. He saw that he was now considered a hero by all the women. He had to keep up that impression. He asked the princess to summon Brihannala to his presence. Arjuna entered the hall with shy hesitant steps. It looked as though he was ready to faint with shyness. Uttara Kumara said: "I hear from Sairandhri that you were the charioteer to Arjuna. She says that you are the greatest of all charioteers. Indra's Matali, Daruka of Krishna, Sumantra of Dasaratha are all insignificant when they are compared with you. That is what Sairandhri says. I want you to be my charioteer. I have to go now to fight with the host of the Kaurava army. Please get ready". Arjuna smiled shyly and said: "My lord, what do I know of fighting? I can only dance and sing. I am afraid I can do nothing to help you". Uttara Kumara said: "Sairandhri gives me a different version of your accomplishments. This is not the time for modesty. Please get ready. I must leave at once for the

battle-field". The princess brought a dress glowing like the sun, to be worn by Arjuna. He pretended that he did not know how to put it on. He made such a fool of himself in his attempts to put it on, that all the girls in the hall laughed at him. Peal on peal of laughter greeted the ears of all. Finally, in exasperation, the prince came and put the armour on Brihannala with his own hands. That was what Arjuna wanted. He would not dress himself: not when he went out to fight. He told Uttara Kumara: "I am ready, my lord. I will take you wherever you want to go. You can fight the Kauravas single-handed. I am waiting to see the glorious spectacle. Let us proceed, my lord".

They took affectionate farewell of all their companions. The chariot was about to leave the palace gates. The princess Uttaraa ran up to the chariot and said: "Brihannala, when you come back do not forget to bring me beautiful silks and garments from the enemies after my brother has defeated them". Arjuna smiled at her and said: "I will not forget it, my little princess. I promise to bring you the beautiful silks worn by the Kaurava heroes". They set out in the direction in which the Kauravas had come to carry away the cattle.

CHAPTER 15

ARJUNA AND THE YOUNG PRINCE

Uttara Kumara said: "Please hurry. I am impatient to meet the enemies who have dared to invade our city when my father is away. They thought, perhaps, that there are no heroes left in Virata. I will show them". They proceeded towards the enemy camp. Arjuna was driving fast in the direction of the outskirts of the city where the burning-grounds were situated. He was smiling to himself all the while. They had gone quite some distance when there came to their ears a great noise, like that of the ocean on a night when the moon is full. Uttara Kumara heard it and said: "Brihannala, what is that noise?" Arjuna said: "My lord, it is the noise from the Kaurava army: the army which you are to meet and vanquish in a few moments more". The chariot had gone a few yards nearer now. Uttara Kumara could now see the army. His eyes were wide with amazement. He just looked at it and said nothing. He was struck dumb. His tongue had gone dry and he felt as though he would choke.

Arjuna continued as if nothing had happened. He said: "I have brought you to the spot from where you can see the Kaurava army arrayed just in front of you. Look, my lord. There, on the white horse, is seated Duryodhana, the Kaurava monarch. See how grand he looks. By his side you can see Dussasana, his dear brother. He is riding a grey horse. Can you see someone approach him? He is riding a beautiful brown horse. Can you see his noble handsome face? Can you see his wide beautiful chest? That is Radheya, the dearest friend of Duryodhana. He is the greatest archer on the side of the Kauravas. The king Duryodhana thinks that Arjuna is as good as dead since his Radheya has sworn to kill him in the war that is to be fought very soon. Look in the other direction. Can you see the morning sun caught in a noose of gems set in a coronet? The coronet is worn by Bheeshma, the great veteran. He is the uncrowned king of all this Kuru land. He renounced his claim to the throne. If it had not been for that, the history of the House of Kurus would have been quite different. By his side stands Drona, the preceptor of the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Near him stands Aswatthama, his son. You can see even from here the jewel gleaming on his forehead. He is greater than even Arjuna. You can now be the first person to fight with all of them single-handed. Come, let us proceed quickly towards the field of battle."

Uttara Kumara took one look at the army. His nerves failed him. His knees began to tremble. His brow was wet with drops of sweat. He looked at Arjuna and, with tears in his eyes, he spoke: "I am frightened at the sight of this army. It is immense. Looking at the Kaurava heroes my courage has oozed out. They are all invincible. I can see that. How can I, single-handed, fight these great people? Indra himself will be frightened of this dreadful army. They are all pastmasters in the art of fighting. How can I fight with them? My body burns and I feel faint. My father, in his fight with the Trigartas, has taken away all the army. I am left alone. I am just a young boy. How can I fight with the Kauravas? Please turn the chariot back. If I look at this army for a moment more I am sure to faint. Please take me back to the city. I am not going to fight. My mind is made up".

Arjuna laughed at him and said: "You are frightened of the enemies. You are asking me to turn back. But a few moments back you said: 'Take me quickly to the battle-field'. My dear prince, I tell you, do not be frightened of these Kauravas. They are not so powerful as they appear. You can easily defeat them. I will guide your chariot through their ranks easily. You are the son of a warrior. You are the nephew of Keechaka who was a very great man. He was the commander of

your army. You must have some of his bravery in you. You must not lose heart so easily. Any number of difficulties may confront you. But if you tackle them one by one you will find that they are not so formidable after all. I will lead you through the enemy ranks. Take heart. This will bring you lasting fame. Remember what you said in the presence of your sister and the other women in the palace of your father. You left the city with such pomp. And now, if you return like this from the battle-field, they will be ashamed of you. You are not going back. You are going to fight. I will not let you go back. Everyone will laugh at you and your cowardice if you go back now. I was mistaken in you. Because Sairandhri was for my coming with you, and because I was charmed by your brave words, I came out with you. Why are you afraid of this army? Even I, who is supposed to be afraid because of my sex, even I, am not scared. Why should you be? Please do not bring shame on the family of the Matsyas by turning your back on the fight. Come, let us go. Be brave and you will surely be able to defeat the Kauravas".

Uttara Kumara would not listen. He said: "I do not care. Brihannala, you cannot understand my feelings. Let them take away all our things: our cattle, our wealth. Let the world laugh at me. I do not care. Let the Kauravas keep all our cows: they are welcome to it. As for me, I am going to return. I am not going to listen to you. I am going back to the city". Uttara Kumara jumped from the chariot and began to run in the direction of the city. Arjuna was very angry with him. He said: "This does not become a prince. You are a kshatriya. Please do not bring disgrace to your race. Death on the battle-field is better than this flight". Arjuna's words fell on deaf ears. Uttara Kumara was running as fast as he could.

Arjuna jumped down from the chariot. With his red mantle and his long hair flying in the breeze, he ran behind the runaway boy. The earth resounded with his fast and firm steps. They had come very near the field when all this took place. They could be seen by the enemies. The soldiers and others too were looking at everything that was happening. They saw a lonely chariot first, coming from the city. They saw a young man run away from the fight and a strangely attired person pursuing him. They saw the entire drama as they would a dumb show. Their interest was now aroused. The soldiers spoke among themselves: "Who is this young boy who jumped out of the chariot and ran away? Who is this other person whose attire is so fantastic?" They were still watching. The attention of Drona was caught now. He said: "He is dressed like a woman. But he is a man. The boy is running away because he is scared, I can see that. The person who is following him seems to be trying to force him to come back and fight.

He is dressed like a woman. But, wait a moment! His figure is familiar to me. I have it! It is very much like Arjuna! It is the same head and the same neck. I can recognize it even from here: from this distance. Those beautiful arms can belong to no one else. I know them. Look at those wide shoulders and that broad chest. It *is* Arjuna and no one else. It can only be Arjuna who has the courage to face our army alone".

Radheya was listening to the words of Drona. He said: "In the city of Virata, all the soldiers had to go with the king to fight with our Susarma. Only this son of the king had been left behind. He was desperate. He must have caught hold of a eunuch to drive his chariot and come to the battle front. Admirable, so far. They came up to the edge of the army. Looking at it, the poor child has lost his nerve, evidently. I do not blame him! He has jumped out of the chariot and he is running away as fast as he can. The charioteer is even more nervous. He is running after the young boy: faster too, since he does not want to be left alone. That is what is happening there. I do not see why the name of Arjuna should be brought up now". Kripa said: "Drona is right. It *is* Arjuna. He is pursuing the boy. He will bring him back. He is planning to make that boy his charioteer and he is going to be the fighter. I can guess that much from the actions of the two". Duryodhana was now irritated by this talk. He said: "Let him be Arjuna: let him be Krishna: let him be Bhargava himself. It does not matter. None of them will be able to face us now. Even if it is anyone else in the form of a woman I will fell him with my sharp arrows if he dares to fight with me".

While this talk was going on, Arjuna was running after Uttara Kumara. He came up with him and caught him by the hair. All the appeals of the prince were of no avail. Arjuna would not let him go. He dragged him to the chariot and said: "You must not run away. I will not let you go. If you are afraid to fight, become my charioteer. Sit in my place and take the reins. I will do the fighting. You can depend on me. I will take care of you. Nothing can harm you as long as I am here. You are a kshatriya. Remember that. You must not run away from the battle-field". Arjuna made the young prince get rid of his fear to some extent. He made him take up the reins and himself sat inside the chariot. Arjuna wanted his Gandiva and his quivers. He made Uttara Kumara turn the chariot in the direction of the Sami tree where they had placed their weapons.

Evil omens were seen in the Kaurava army: omens which spelt defeat for them. Drona spoke to Bheeshma: "My lord, I am sure it is Arjuna there in the chariot". He spoke these words in code. He regretted his impulsive declaration that it was Arjuna. He did not want

Arjuna to be recognized by the others. He did not want the discovery to be premature. He therefore spoke to Bheeshma in code. In the same code Bheeshma replied: "I see what you mean. I can assure you, you need not be worried. The time limit which we were talking about in the court the other day, has been passed. You need not be nervous any more. The Pandavas are safe. I knew it even then, in the court, when we were discussing it. I did not want to volunteer the information. I want Duryodhana to learn a lesson. He may realize that the Pandavas are not easy opponents. This lesson may prove to be beneficial to him and avert the greater tragedy that threatens to come true".

With great relief surging in his heart, Drona openly said: "Duryodhana, I am sure I am seeing Arjuna and no one else. He has disguised himself but I can recognize him. It is Arjuna, the archer who has no equal in this wide world. I have seen my Arjuna after thirteen years". Tears blinded the old man as he looked and looked at his beloved pupil. He kept on talking about Arjuna and his prowess. He roused the anger of Radheya. Radheya said: "You are always praising Arjuna and singing about his glory. Arjuna is not one sixteenth as wonderful as our king or myself". Duryodhana said: "If this is Arjuna, our purpose is served. We can send the Pandavas back to the forest for a further period of twelve years. If this is a god in the form of a eunuch I will fell him with my arrows". Bheeshma, Drona, Kripa and Aswatthama appreciated these brave and fearless words of the king.

Chapter 16

THE SAMI TREE

Arjuna, in the meantime, had reached the Sami tree. He saw that the poor prince was too delicate and nervous to fight. He looked kindly at him and said: "I want you to get up this tree. On the tree is placed a mighty bow called the Gandiva. The bow which I have now is not powerful enough. These weapons you have brought are too delicate for the fight which I have ahead of me. You must, therefore, get up on this tree and get for me the weapons of the great Pandavas which have been kept there. Make haste. Get up on the tree". The prince looked up at the tree and said: "I can see nothing but a corpse hanging from the topmost branch. You know that I am a kshatriya.

How can I touch a corpse? Brihannala, please do not make me do these things. I must not touch a corpse. It is not good for me". Arjuna laughed at him and said: "I know that you are a kshatriya. You belong to a great house. I will not insult your birth. Do not be afraid. It is not a corpse. The weapons of the Pandavas are placed inside that bundle that looks like a corpse. I know it. Please bring it down from the tree". Uttara Kumara got up on the tree and cut the rope which was holding the bundle to the branch of the tree. He came down. As directed by Arjuna, he unwrapped the bundle. Amazement spread over his features. He saw the weapons of the Pandavas. He thought that a thousand rainbows were there before his eyes, so wonderful was the glow that was coming from them.

Uttara Kumara looked at Arjuna. He saw tears were flowing from his eyes. He could not share the feelings which choked Arjuna. Looking at the wonderful weapons, Uttara Kumara was overcome with a terrible fear and trembling. He was afraid even to look at them. Finally he plucked up enough courage to look at Arjuna and talk to him. He said: "Brihannala, is this a bow or is it a live serpent? These arrows glow like the sun and fire. I have never seen weapons like these before. They are beautiful. Will you tell me who owns these? Please enlighten me". Arjuna had now composed himself. He said: "The bow which you first touched belongs to Arjuna. It is famed the world over by the name Gandiva. It is the only bow of its kind in the world. It brings lasting fame to the person who possesses it. It first belonged to Brahma for a thousand years. It was then with Indra for five thousand years. The Moon had it with him afterwards for a long time. After that Varuna, the lord of the oceans, had it with him. Agni, the god of fire, got it from Varuna and gave it to Arjuna when he burnt the Khandava forest. It has been with Arjuna all these years. This other bow decorated with gold and blue stones belongs to Bheema. This is the bow which conquered all his enemies during the great Rajasuya. This other bow, which is red because of the glow of gold and the many rubies set in it, belongs to Nakula, the son of Maadri. This bow, set with emeralds in gold, belongs to Sahadeva. This graceful bow, with the little golden bells tinkling in the breeze, this bow belongs to Yudhishthira, the eldest Pandava. Look at these arrows. They belong to the Pandavas. You can see that they all bear monograms. This is the quiver of Arjuna and this is the other one given to him along with the Gandiva. They are never empty. These are all the weapons of the Pandavas. They were left here by them when they went out on their thirteenth year of exile, the year of hiding".

Uttara Kumara looked at the weapons for a long time with wide open eyes. He was silent for a long time. Then he said: "Leaving their dear weapons, where have the Pandavas gone? We heard that they left the Kamyaka and Dwaitavana after having spent twelve years there. They have not been seen anywhere since then. They have not been heard of, after that. Where are they? Can you tell me where they are now?" Arjuna smiled a sweet smile and said: "Listen to me, Uttara Kumara. The Pandavas are all in Virata". He smiled again at the look of sheer amazement that spread over the face of Uttara Kumara. He said: "I am Arjuna. Kanka, the companion of your father, is Yudhishthira. Your cook Valala is Bheema. Damagranthi, who is in charge of your horses, is Nakula; and your cowherd Tantripala is Sahadeva. Sairandhri, who was the cause of Keechaka's death, is Draupadi".

Uttara Kumara took some time to digest this piece of news. He said: "Tell me your ten names and tell me why you got those names". Arjuna said: "My ten names are Arjuna, Phalguna, Jishnu, Kiriti, Swetavahana, Bhibhatsu, Vijaya, Partha, Savyasachi and Dhananjaya. I was called Dhananjaya when I conquered all the kings during the Rajasuya and collected wealth from all of them. I always fight to a finish and I never return without winning, and so I am called Vijaya. My horses which were given to me by Agni are white and so I am called Swetavahana. My father Indra gave me a beautiful crown when I was with him. That is why I am called Kiriti. I have never fought by unfair means in any battle. They therefore call me Bhibhatsu; I never frighten my enemies by meanness. I can use both my hands when I send the arrows. That is why I am called Savyasachi. My complexion is unique like the tree Arjuna. My name is also stainless. Hence I am called Arjuna. I was born on the slopes of the Himavan in a place called Satasringa on a day when the star Uttara Phalguna was in the ascent. That has given me the name Phalguna. I am called Jishnu because of the fact that I will be terrible when I am angry. I have taken an oath that I will destroy the person who hurts my brother Yudhishthira and spills his blood on the earth. He will be destroyed and his kinsmen too. I cannot be vanquished by anyone. My mother is called Pritha. As her son, I am Partha. You have heard my names. I am here to fight for you and to rescue your cows. Come and see me fight. You need have no fear of the Kauravas when I have taken up your cause".

The young prince was almost faint with the fear in his heart. He thought of the many indignities the Pandavas had suffered in Virata. He felt terribly sorry and ashamed of himself and his father. He fell at the feet of Arjuna and said: "I am announcing myself. I am Bhoominjaya, or Uttara Kumara. I am the son of the king of Virata. I

am fortunate to be the first person to meet the great Arjuna after the Ajnaatavaasa of the Pandavas. I am sorry about the fact that you heroes had to do menial service in our city. We must have offended you in a thousand ways. On behalf of my father and all the people of the court, I ask you to pardon us for all the insults which must have been showered on you all. You are noble. You must be kind to us and protect us. Please be good to us". His tears ran incessantly. Arjuna raised him up from the ground. He embraced him. He wiped the boy's tears away and comforted him. He said: "Come, it is getting late. Do not feel so bad. We have been very happy in Virata. We are not in the least angry with you or your father. But there is now no time for talk. Let us hurry towards the enemy army. Be my charioteer, Uttara Kumara. I will fight with them. My hands are itching for the feel of the Gandiva. You will see some fun. Do not be afraid anymore". Uttara Kumara smiled bravely and said: "From to-day, I will never, never be frightened any more. My fear has vanished like snow at the sight of the sun". He sat in the chariot after helping Arjuna into it. Arjuna saluted the Gandiva and took it up in his mighty hands. The chariot turned towards the enemy camp once again.

CHAPTER 17

RADHEYA AND ASWATTHAMA

Arjuna had removed the lion banner of the Matsyas from the chariot and fixed his own ape banner. He travelled fast towards the battle-field. He blew his famed conch Devadatta. His chariot made the characteristic noise. He approached the front. He had the Gandiva in his hand. He twanged the string. The noise struck terror into the hearts of the enemies. Arjuna had taken his stand.

Drona was thrilled to hear the noise of the Gandiva and the tone of Devadatta. He looked extremely happy. He said: "Here comes Arjuna. We will have to return the cows and return to Hastinapura. I know that Arjuna will not be here long without destroying our entire army. Let us all go back. It is no use fighting". Duryodhana came to the presence of the Acharya. He said: "My lord, please do not talk like this. You are just discouraging the troops. You know the purpose of this expedition. We decided on it even in Hastinapura. The capture of the cows was just a pretext. The real and serious purpose was to bring the Pandavas into the open. I said: 'If the Pandavas appear in

front of us before the thirteenth year has expired we can send them back to the forest for a further period of twelve years.' Arjuna has appeared now. Perhaps he is too hasty in revealing himself. Perhaps he thinks that his days of hiding are over. It is up to our revered grandfather to tell us clearly whether the thirteenth year has come to an end. Arjuna has come out into the open to protect the cows of Virata. We had decided that Susarma should attack Virata on the southern side on the eighth day after the new moon and that we should begin our attack on the ninth day. So far, everything has worked out according to our plan. We do not know what has been done by Susarma. Either he has captured the cows and gone away, or he has been defeated by Virata. If it is the latter, we are officially here to help him since he is our dear friend. If he has been defeated and the Matsya king is coming here to fight with us, we must fight. Supposing that Susarma has defeated Virata and that Arjuna has come to fight on his behalf, even then we have to fight. What do I see now? Great warriors like Bheeshma, Drona and Kripa just sitting in their chariots: all because Arjuna has come into the picture. What if he comes? Can he put so much fear into your hearts? Who is here prepared to go back to the city of Hastinapura without fighting even if Indra or Yama comes to fight with us? If you, our preceptor, put fear into the hearts of these ordinary soldiers, what can I do? Should you not arrange the army and do what is needful? Please do not praise that Arjuna any longer. Please do something that will bring order to the ranks. They are all upset. You are saying the wrong things at the wrong time. You must stop this praise of Arjuna and think of us".

Radheya came up and said: "It looks as though the entire army is nervous: thanks to the words of our Acharya. No one seems to be keen on fighting. But it matters nothing to me. Let it be Bhargava himself or Indra. Let it be Arjuna with Krishna. I am not worried. I will fight with them all single-handed. Let everyone watch me shoot my keen arrows at him. My arrows will fly like serpents. They will leave my bow like a continuous flow of oil. They will kill my enemy. I will make his banner fall to the ground like a tree uprooted by the gale. For thirteen years now, I have been longing for this encounter with Arjuna. I am so happy that my dream is to come true. My arrows will fly so fast and so steadily that the string of my bow will be making continuous music like the drowsy murmur of summer bees. I will cover the body of Arjuna with a thousand arrows. His bleeding form will look like a mountain covered by red flowers. I will capture Arjuna from his chariot like the sacred Garuda capturing the snake. I will please my lord and friend Duryodhana by removing an arrow

from his heart: the arrow which has been hurting him for the last so many years. I am sure of it. As for you, who seem to be scared of Arjuna, you can all go away from here or stand on the battle-field and watch me fight with my enemy".

Kripa said: "Radheya, you are always thinking of war and killing. One should fight only when it is absolutely necessary. When the general good can be effected without fighting, then fighting should be avoided. You do not like to admit that your opponent is greater than you. Arjuna can fight with anyone single-handed. But you cannot. He allowed the Khandava forest to be burnt and he defeated Indra who tried to defend the forest. He did it single-handed. Recently, he was the one to rescue Duryodhana from the Gandharvas with just his brothers to assist him. He did not take an army with him. If I remember right, among those who went there with an army, one great hero ran away from the fight jumping off his chariot. I do not have to relate all the achievements of Arjuna. You know them all only too well. You have heard about the killing of the Kalakeyas and the Nivatakavachas. It was all done single-handed. It is no use talking about the greatness of your enemy to you. Still I have to talk since I do not want you to make a fool of yourself. You are trying to remove the poison fangs from the mouth of a serpent by putting your right hand into its mouth. Arjuna is like a lion which has just come out of its captivity. Nothing can equal his fury. He will be like a spark of fire dropped on a pile of cotton. You and I and all of us will be burnt up in no time if this fight is allowed to begin. If, however, you are bent on fighting, do not try to tackle that forest fire single-handed. Let us arrange our troops properly. All of us will have to meet him as a single unit. The six of us, Drona, Duryodhana, Bheeshma, your good self, Aswatthama and myself must meet him combining our efforts. Your talk about fighting with him just by yourself is, I am afraid, too optimistic. You do not know what you are saying. You think too much of yourself and too little of Arjuna".

Radheya was wild at the tone of contempt which Kripa used. He said: "I can see that the great Kripacharya has lost his nerve on seeing Arjuna. Those who are afraid need not fight. I can, alone, repay the debt I owe to my friend Duryodhana, by killing Arjuna". Radheya turned to Duryodhana and said: "Brahmins, my lord, are fit to be in the council only on certain occasions. They are good to consult when alms are to be distributed or when a feast is to be given. They should not be consulted when a war is to be fought. Let this great Acharya Kripa go home. He is afraid of Arjuna. I will fight".

Aswatthama was listening to this talk for quite some time. His anger now became uncontrollable. He looked at Duryodhana and

Radheya. He said: "You have not done anything about defending the cows so far. You are not doing anything. You are just listening, Duryodhana, to your dear friend and his plans about what he is going to do. The cows have not left the boundary of the Matsya kingdom. They have not reached Hastinapura yet. Please talk after you have done something to talk about. Radheya, listen to me. Brahmins are all righteous. They do not brag. Wise men do not brag. As for you, you are just a pompous braggart. You cannot do anything. Those who act do not talk about it. Look at the fire. It cooks food for the entire world. Does it talk about it? Look on the sun. He does more work in one moment than all the other gods put together. Does he make a song about it? Does he say, 'Look at me. I am doing so much work. Come and be amazed'? Look on this mighty earth. She bears the burden of animate and inanimate things. She has been patient for thousands of years. Does she talk about it and say, 'Look on me and admire my patience. I am doing so much. Am I not wonderful'? She does not. All of them do their work *silently* without talking about it. But you seem to be of a different calibre. You can only talk".

Aswatthama turned to Duryodhana and said: "Brahmins do not win kingdoms by playing dice. Real heroes do not cheat at games and then talk as though they have won a kingdom in a battle. You are a great king indeed, Duryodhana. But you are worse than a vaisya. A vaisya is good at selling and cheating. You call yourself a kshatriya. Which kshatriya has won his kingdom by cheating his opponent, cheating him in a game of dice, of all things? You are worse than a vaisya. He cheats because it is his profession. But you have adopted a profession which is far inferior to your class and you glory in your dishonesty. Is it so wonderful after all to enjoy a kingdom won by cheating? Did you win the beautiful city of Indraprastha by fighting for it? Did you make Yudhishthira and his powerful brothers your slaves by taking them captives in war? Did you win the fiery Draupadi as your slave in a fight with the Pandavas? No! The great Kaurava Duryodhana won them all in a game of dice! Even that game, you did not play yourself. You had to have the help of that crooked uncle of yours for that! You felled at one stroke that sandal wood tree called Yudhishthira. Do you remember what Vidura said? The wise man said: 'The creatures of the earth inherit, to a certain extent, the patience and forgiving nature of mother earth. Even insects and ants forgive, if they have to'. But you have transgressed the rules of conduct so far in the case of the Pandavas that their minds will not be for forgiveness. You went too far when you insulted their queen Draupadi. Their anger is terrible. This Arjuna has now appeared as your nemesis. He has come to avenge their wrongs. Please do not insult my father and

my uncle by calling them cowards. They can face Indra and the entire host of the heavens. They are not afraid, as your dear friend seems to suggest. They can recognize greatness wherever they see it. They admire Arjuna because he deserves their admiration. They talk disparagingly of Radheya since they know that he is nothing in front of Arjuna. I will say it too. Who can equal the greatness of Arjuna? He is the greatest of all heroes. Because of his skill and his noble nature and his chivalry, he is dear to the heart of my father. I do not see anything wrong in giving praise ungrudgingly where it is due. Your dear Radheya has always been jealous of Arjuna. As for you, you have ruined all your noble qualities because of this one fault in you: this envy for the five Pandavas. Let anyone fight. I have decided not to fight. If Virata comes to fight, then I will help you. But I will not assist this Radheya in his fight against Arjuna. Arjuna is as dear to me as he is to my father". Aswatthama threw down his bow and arrows and sat down silent in his car.

CHAPTER 18

DURYODHANA'S HEART-BREAK

Bheeshma intervened. He said: "What Drona says is true. I think Kripa's words are also right. The great Aswatthama spoke only the truth when he explained the feelings which prompted the brahmins to speak those words. They should not be insulted, as they have been by Radheya. Duryodhana, consider the circumstances. You do not think of them at all. In your love for your friend, you allow this to happen. You must not allow this dissension to take place. There must not be any dissension in the army. You must pacify these great men. You must not allow our heroes to fight among themselves." Bheeshma looked at Aswatthama and said: "You must not be offended by the words of Radheya. He spoke those words since he wanted the troops to be encouraged. The time is not right for you to show your anger. You must forgive their rash talk. You three must forgive these youngsters. They thought that the words of your father and your uncle, spoken in admiration of Arjuna, may ruin the morale of the army. That is the reason why Radheya spoke so vehemently. Please be good enough to forget these things and concentrate on the immediate danger. We must all combine and attack Arjuna. Wise people have short memories".

Aswatthama was slightly mollified by the words of Bheeshma. He said: "Let my father forgive them. Let my uncle forgive them. I will not be angry if they give up their anger. I only thought that the merits of the enemy need not make this man jealous". Duryodhana realized the gravity of the situation. He asked Drona and Kripa to forgive them. He made Radheya also to ask them for forgiveness. Drona said: "My anger vanished as soon as I heard the words of Bheeshma. Let us now forget this talk. Let us make arrangements so that Arjuna does not meet Duryodhana in the fight. I know that Arjuna has not revealed himself before the expiry of the thirteenth year. The exile of the Pandavas is over. Arjuna's anger against Duryodhana will be terrible. Let us avert this meeting. I have no doubt that their period of exile is over. I request our revered Bheeshma to clear the doubts of dear Duryodhana".

Bheeshma looked with pity at Duryodhana and said: "My child, Drona is right. Their term is over. The revolution of the wheel of time is steady. The stars and planets, however, have their effect on its progress. Astrologers have calculated every moment which slips by unnoticed by us. According to them, every five years there is an increase of two months in the length of time. During these thirteen years there has been *an increase of five months and twelve days.* The Pandavas have spent twelve years in the forest and one year in hiding. But they have spent five months in unnecessary exile. This must have been known to Yudhishthira, and to the four brothers of that gentle soul. Yudhishthira is very righteous and very noble. He did not want to lessen the final year by these five months. With his brothers he has allowed himself to suffer that also in silence. He did not want to shorten this year. He does not want any argument about the exile. He does not want any hair-splitting arguments about the facts. Therefore he stayed silent. Arjuna knows that the thirteenth year is gone. That is why he has come out into the open. Even that he has done because he wanted to help his king. The Pandavas, who are bound by the shackles of Dharma, will never transgress it. They will never tell a lie. If Yudhishthira says that the term of the exile is over, it is over. That is all". He waited for a moment. Then he continued: "Look at this Arjuna. He cannot be conquered. If he and his brothers decide to fight with us we have no chance of defeating them. I am very fond of you. I do not want to see you destroyed. This is your only chance. Why do you still think of them as your enemies? Return their kingdom to the Pandavas. Make peace with them. You will be happy. All the world will be spared from slaughter. Take my advice. Summon the Pandavas to your presence and return their kingdom to them".

Duryodhana's face was pale with disappointment. All his dreams

of sending them back to the forest were gone for ever. His eyes became red with anger. He said: "I will not return their kingdom to the Pandavas. Let us now talk about war and nothing else. I am going to fight: now and later too. Please make all arrangements for the war now". Drona said: "Please take my advice. Let us divide the army into four parts. Duryodhana, you take one fourth of the army with you. You must proceed towards Hastinapura". He looked at the others and said: "The king must be guarded at all costs. We must not allow an encounter between Duryodhana and Arjuna. Let another fourth of the army take the cattle and proceed towards Hastinapura. The other half of the army will remain here and fight with Arjuna. Bheeshma, Kripa, Aswatthama, Radheya and myself will fight with Arjuna. Even if Indra himself comes to his aid we will not care. But now the noise of Arjuna's chariot can be heard. He is coming fast. Let us hurry and despatch the king to the capital".

Bheeshma took entire charge of the situation. He made the army arrange itself properly. He said: "Let Drona be in the middle of the phalanx. Let Aswatthama stand to his left and guard the left wing. Let Kripa guard the right wing. Radheya will be at the front, the van of the army. I will be at the back, defending the rear of the army. Five of us can manage to defy him, I think". They were ready.

The chariot of Arjuna came fast in their direction. Arjuna looked at the army arrayed in the form of a crescent. It was called Vajra Vyuha. It meant that it was as hard as a diamond to penetrate. Arjuna smiled to himself. He said: "This must be the arrangement of my grandfather. He is skilled in the arrangements of the army in these diverse phalanxes". He looked again and saw the banner of his grandfather. It was the golden palm tree, the sight of which would always strike terror into the hearts of his enemies.

Chapter 19

THE ROUTING OF THE KAURAVA ARMY

Out of the air there flew two arrows which fell at the feet of Drona. Bheeshma and Kripa too were greeted by two arrows each falling at their feet. Two more arrows came. They brushed past the ears of Drona: Bheeshma and Kripa too heard arrows whispering past their ears. They were pleased with this. It was a very beautiful

gesture on the part of Arjuna. The first two were his salutation: he had met them after thirteen years. He was announcing himself. The next two were sent asking them for permission to fight with them. The fight began.

Arjuna advanced with the speed of wind. He looked at his opponents. He told Uttara Kumara: "I can see that this phalanx is arranged like this to bar my way. I can see the Kuru veterans here and I can see Radheya. But I cannot find Duryodhana. There, a portion is proceeding towards Hastinapura. I can see their plan. They do not want me to meet Duryodhana. He is going away with the cows and a portion of the army too. Come, let us pursue him. We must first release the cows". Uttara Kumara steered the chariot in the direction which Arjuna indicated. They went along the western wing. Arjuna fought as he went along. Several of the brothers of Duryodhana opposed him. But they could not stop him. He was set on pursuing the banner of Duryodhana, the serpent embroidered on a cloth of gold. Arjuna said: "I am not keen on fighting with anyone else. I want to rescue the cows and I want to meet this man who has caused us untold harm. I want to meet this man, this proud haughty monarch who has caused our queen so much pain. I want to kill all those who laughed at us then. But the king has escaped my sight. This must be the work of Drona. I am sure he wants to save the life of the king. Or else, the king Duryodhana will never run away from the battle-field. I must pursue him. Do not pay any attention to this army. Go in the direction where we can see the serpent banner".

The chariot roared past Bheeshma. He looked at Arjuna and divined his intentions. He told the others: "Arjuna is pursuing the king like a lion its prey. We cannot let him vent his anger against the king now. He will kill him in no time. Let us not worry about the cows now. We must meet Arjuna". Bheeshma hurried to the help of the king. Arjuna had reached the portion of the army which was leading the cattle away. He asked Uttara Kumara to proceed slowly. He said: "Let us first release the cows". He fought with the soldiers who were guarding the cows. They were overpowered by the terrible arrows which poured out of his bow in an unending stream. The guards were made to run away. With their tails raised, with their calves running with them in fear, the cows of Virata turned back and began to run in the southern direction. They were going towards the city. The cowherds were happy that the cows had been released.

Arjuna's chariot was going towards the king who had one fourth of the army to guard him. The veterans watched the manoeuvres of Arjuna. They prepared themselves to meet him and impede his progress. The phalanx was all broken up. Radheya, Bheeshma and the others pro-

ceeded towards Arjuna. Arjuna tried his level best to avoid wounding his guru, Drona. He faced the brothers of Duryodhana. Fighting them all along, he reached the spot where Radheya was advancing towards him. Arjuna said: "Uttara Kumara, look. This man is Radheya. He has ever been my rival. He is a great archer. He is a disciple of Bhargava. He is a master of all the many divine astras. He is unparalleled in valour and in skill. He is a great hero. Take me to him. Look, the king has returned. Look at the serpent banner advancing towards us. I am glad he is coming. I knew that Duryodhana will never be a coward and run away from the battle-field. He is also coming here. Bheeshma, my dear grandfather is coming towards us. He is bent on protecting the king. Bheeshma is the greatest of the Kuru heroes. He has now become a soldier in the army of Duryodhana. Yes, they are all, all of them, everyone of them, under the magnetism of Duryodhana. I want to fight with all of them. Take my chariot to the centre of the field from where I can fight". The chariot advanced rapidly.

Aswatthama smiled at Radheya as if to say: "Let us see what you are going to do now. Your chance has come". He said: "Radheya, look. Arjuna is coming, eager to fight with you. For years you have been making the council hall resound with your talk about how you will kill Arjuna. He is now here: roaring like a lion in the arena. Let us see you fight. If you are beaten, you can go back to the council hall at Hastinapura and confer with the crooked-minded Sakuni about some other shady trick to banish the Pandavas once again". Radheya's eyes spat fire. He said: "Please do not keep on taunting me. I am not afraid of Arjuna. I have never been afraid. I am not afraid of even Krishna. You can see how I can fight. I will show you". Arjuna advanced with a smile on his face. Duryodhana had reached the centre of the field. He was ready to fight. Arjuna was surrounded on all sides by the great heroes of the Kaurava army. Bheeshma, Drona, Kripa, Aswatthama, Duryodhana, Radheya, Sakuni and Vikarna. It was a terrible fight. They all fought with him: all together and one by one. Arjuna was undaunted. He was bent on fighting with Radheya. He concentrated on him.

Arjuna singled out Radheya. The fight was wonderful. All the others stood spellbound as they watched the duel. Both were great archers. Both vied with each other in valour and in skill. Arjuna was as angry as the heavens when they rain destruction on the earth. He said: "Come, Radheya. Let us now settle some old scores. You have taken an oath that you will kill me and I have sworn that I will kill you. Let us see who is to win and keep his word. I have heard you talk. I have heard you say that there is no one to equal you in skill and in bravery. The time has come when you will have to prove

your statements. I will see how you are going to escape alive from me". Radheya laughed and said: "I am just as keen, my dear Arjuna. to fight with you and fight to a finish, a duel with you. I do not want to waste my time in empty talk. Come, let us fight".

They fought for a long time. The arrows of Radheya were so swift that their path could not be followed by the eye. They were sharp. They wounded Arjuna and his horses and his charioteer too. Uttara Kumara stood his ground. The young prince had become a hero all on a sudden. So great was the influence of Arjuna. His bravery was contagious. For a long time Radheya withstood the onslaught of Arjuna. But finally he had to admit defeat. His forehead, his neck, his shoulders, his arms, his broad chest were all covered by the arrows of Arjuna. Radheya had to give up fighting. He had to abandon the fighting and run away from the field.

Arjuna encountered Drona. Aswatthama came to the help of his father, when he found that Arjuna was winning. Arjuna was like a forest fire burning up everything that came in his path. Drona, Aswatthama and Kripa were all defeated by Arjuna. He was like some divine fighter. He looked like no ordinary mortal. Bheeshma came to their help. Arjuna defeated every one of them. He wanted to meet Duryodhana. He went in the direction where Duryodhana was stationed. The two encountered each other. The king was already disappointed at the way things were shaping. He found his army being scattered in all the four directions by Arjuna. He opposed Arjuna valiantly. But he could not fight for a long time. Arjuna killed his horses and elephants. Duryodhana could not withstand this powerful cousin of his. He had to run away from the field. Arjuna followed him with words which were sharper than his arrows. He said: "You have today abandoned your fame and your reputation on the field of battle. Is it right for a kshatriya to be such a coward? Are you so fond of this life of yours that you are prepared to lose your name in exchange for it? What is life, after all? A few moments. You are behaving like a coward. Death on the battle-field is more to be desired than such a life. They have named you Duryodhana. It means that it is very hard to oppose you and fight with you. They call you Suyodhana. It means that you are a good fighter. You have today made both your names meaningless by this your behaviour. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Come, be a man and fight".

Stung by these cruel words of Arjuna, Duryodhana came back to fight. He fought like a wounded serpent. His pride was wounded. He had always been highly sensitive. He could not bear the insults that were being heaped upon him. Radheya came to his support on the right side. But it was not possible to defeat Arjuna. Drona and

the rest of them came up and surrounded Arjuna once again. Arjuna decided that he had caused enough havoc in the army. He invoked the astra called Sammohana. It had the power of making them all go into a trance. Prince Uttara Kumara saw the entire army fall down as if in a faint.

Arjuna remembered the request of the princess Uttaraa. He told Uttara Kumara: "They are all under a trance. Get down from the chariot. Go near them and bring their mantles and upper clothes. Go to Kripa and remove from his shoulders the white silk he is wearing. Look at that beautiful yellow silk which is lying on the chest of Radheya. Bring that. Go to Aswatthama and bring his apparel also. The king is sporting a blue silk. That looks lovely. Your sister will like it, I am sure. Collect that. Do not go very near my grandfather. He knows the counter incantations for this astra of mine. He may not be under a trance. Let us not risk going near him". Uttara Kumara leaped down from the chariot. He collected silks and jewels from the sleeping heroes. He came back to the chariot. They were ready to depart. Bheeshma tried to stop the chariot. But his horses were killed by Arjuna. After saluting Bheeshma from that distance, Arjuna returned to the outskirts of the city.

They all got out of the trance. They wanted to pursue Arjuna. But Bheeshma laughed at them and said: "Do not be foolish. Admit that we have been defeated. Let us return to Hastinapura. I saw your dresses and your jewels being taken from you. That means that you have been stripped of your honour: a fitting revenge for what you did to them years back. I tried to stop him but I could not. He could have killed all of you while you were sleeping. But he is too righteous to do that. Let us go back to Hastinapura". Duryodhana was silent. His plans had all gone awry. He saw the chariot of Arjuna in the distant horizon. From there Arjuna sent arrows to fall at the feet of the elders. He took leave of them. He took leave of the king by sending an arrow which felled his crown to the ground. The chariot had gone beyond their sight. With a sigh of heart-break Duryodhana decided to return to Hastinapura.

Arjuna descended from the chariot. He said: "By the grace of god the cows have been saved. The enemies have been defeated. Send out a message to the city announcing your victory. I want to give you a word of warning. Do not let your father know now that the Pandavas are in his court. If he hears it suddenly your father may not be able to stand the shock. Tell him that you fought with the Kaurava army and that you rescued the cows which had been captured by them". Uttara Kumara said: "But that is impossible. The days of my bragging are over. I cannot take credit for something I did

not do". Arjuna said: "Say so for the time being. When the proper time comes you can tell him the truth".

They proceeded towards the Sami tree. The lion banner was placed on the chariot and the ape banner removed. The great Gandiva was tenderly wrapped up and placed with the other weapons. The two proceeded towards the city. Uttara Kumara was now sitting in the chariot and Arjuna was driving it. His hair which had been bound up with a cloth during the fight was once again hanging down his back in a plait.

Chapter 20

YUDHISHTHIRA'S BLOOD

King Virata entered the city in triumph after the Trigartas had been defeated. He had rescued the cows. He was received by the citizens with great pomp and splendour. He entered the city surrounded by the Pandavas. At the palace he was received by the queen and his daughter. The princess Uttaraa told him about the invasion of the Kaurava army and about the young prince Uttara Kumara going to fight with them single-handed. The king was unhappy at this calamity which had befallen him. He was told that Brihannala was the charioteer of the prince. He was sunk in the depths of despair. He said: "What can my child do? The great Kaurava heroes are there. Bheeshma, Drona, Kripa and the invincible Radheya have all come to attack us. What can my son do? Let me collect my army immediately and go to help my son. I thought that all danger had been averted when Susarma had been defeated. I did not bargain for this new danger. I must collect my army at a moment's notice". He was giving instructions to his ministers and his brothers to make arrangements for a second campaign.

Then spoke Yudhishthira: "Do not give way to despair. Having heard that Brihannala is the charioteer to your son, I am not worried: not in the least. Your son will be able to vanquish even Indra or Yama if Brihannala is his charioteer. I know Brihannala and her greatness. Please compose yourself, my king. Please wait for news from the battle front. I assure you that you will soon hear about the success of your son". Hearing the words of Yudhishthira, for whom he had very great respect, the king agreed to be silent. He had

to be patient. His heart was heavy with grief. But he agreed to wait for news from Uttara Kumara.

A few hours of agony passed. Then came some cowherds to the presence of the king. They said: "My lord, we have come from the neighbourhood of the battle field. We saw the prince's chariot being driven by Brihannala. Seeing us, the chariot stopped. Brihannala said: Go at once to the city and announce that the prince has routed the enemies; that he has rescued the cows; that the city should prepare itself to receive him with honour.' The prince is coming to the city after having rescued the cattle from the Kauravas. He has defeated them all in single combat". The cowherds were so excited that they repeated themselves again and again.

Yudhishthira smiled at the message and said: "It is fortunate that success has wooed the king and his son". He added: "But I am not surprised at this. I knew that the prince was sure to win since Brihannala is his charioteer. The charioteer of Indra, by name Matali, and even Krishna, the greatest of all charioteers, will pale into insignificance in front of this Brihannala". The king was delirious with joy. He gave orders for the city to be decorated. He wanted the city to welcome his son in a glorious manner. His orders were all carried out. The king was happy. The palace was a garden of happiness.

The king and Yudhishthira were sitting together. The king's eyes fell on Sairandhri who was standing at a distance attending to the decorations in the hall. He called out to her: "Sairandhri, go and bring the dice. I am so happy. I want to play now." Yudhishthira said: "If I may offer my advice, please do not play. Please do not let us play now. The wise forbid the game when the mind is not normal". The king said: "But that is absurd. We are not playing the game using any stakes: we are just trying to while away the time. There is no harm in the game if it is played now. Come, let us play". Yudhishthira said: "No, my lord. This game is a terrible thing. I know why Yudhishthira lost his kingdom and his brothers and his wife too as stakes in this game of dice. The game of dice robs a man of sane thinking. If Yudhishthira had been in a normal frame of mind he would never have been so foolish. The game goes to the head like wine. It makes a man do the worst things imaginable. You are excited. I am afraid for you. Please do not let us play". But the king was very keen on playing. So Yudhishthira had to agree.

The game began. Virata's mind was full of the victory of his son. Yudhishthira too was just as excited as the king. The success of Arjuna thrilled him. The king said: "I am proud of my son's achievement. To think that he has fought with all the heroes on the side of the

Kauravas makes me so happy and excited. I am indeed proud of my son. He has done a great thing. He has achieved the impossible". Yudhishthira said: "Yes, it is your good fortune that Brihannala was there to hold the reins of your son's horses. That was why the prince was able to win". The king did not like the words of Yudhishthira. He became very angry. He said: "You say that you are not surprised. Is it, then, such an easy thing to defeat the heroes in the Kaurava army? It is a great achievement. You keep on talking about that eunuch as though he is someone great. I tell you, my son is a great hero. You are insulting him and me by talking less of him and more about this dancer. I will excuse you this once. But please take care not to displease me again".

Yudhishthira smiled gently and said: "Truth, my lord, is never pleasant to hear. I will tell you what must have happened. Please announce to the citizens about the victory of Brihannala. It is sure to be as I say. When I say a thing it will always be true. I know that your son must have been the charioteer to Brihannala. She must have been the one to defeat the Kaurava army. Think of that army. It cannot be faced even by the devas. How can a child like your son, be able to defeat them? Only Brihannala would have been able to achieve this victory". The king was beside himself with anger. He took the dice in his hand and threw them forcibly at the head of Yudhishthira. Yudhishthira tried to prevent the dice from hurting him. But he was hit. It hit him on the forehead. Blood began to flow from the wound on his forehead. He would not let the blood fall to the ground. Yudhishthira cupped his hands and received the blood in his hands without letting a single drop fall on the ground. He cast a look of pain at Draupadi. She rushed to him with a bowl of gold filled with water. Yudhishthira washed his hands in it. Draupadi wiped the brow of Yudhishthira with her garment and tried to stop the bleeding.

It was only then that Virata saw what was being done. He asked Draupadi: "Sairandhri, what are you doing? Why are you wiping the blood from the wound of this foolish brahmin with your silken garment?" Draupadi said: "If a drop of blood from the body of this good man touches the ground your kingdom will not have rain for one year. Every drop means one year of famine. If this blood falls on the ground you will be killed by one who has sworn to do it. To save you and your kingdom I am preventing this precious blood from flowing". Virata did not attach any importance to the words of Draupadi. He was still angry with Yudhishthira for his words.

A messenger entered the hall. He said: "The prince is now in the city. He has reached the gates of the palace. He is even now entering the apartments of the king with his companion Brihannala".

Yudhishthira spoke to the messenger in secret. He said: "Please see to it that they do not enter the hall together. Allow the prince to come now. Keep Brihannala back. Let her enter after a little while. I am saying this for the good of your king. His very life depends on your doing what I ask you to do. Please see that Brihannala does not enter along with the prince". The prince Uttara Kumara entered the hall. He was embraced warmly by his father. Uttara Kumara looked beyond him and saw the face of Yudhishthira covered with blood. His heart stopped beating. He was horrified at the sight. He said: "Who has done this cowardly act towards the noblest of men? Who has been indiscreet enough to tread on the tail of a cobra? Who has committed this dastardly crime?" The king smiled and said: "I hit him with the dice. He annoyed me by praising your charioteer and belittling your prowess. So I hit him". The prince said: "Father, you do not know what you have done. Please ask his pardon, nay his forgiveness, immediately. Please do not invite the curse of God on yourself". The king was puzzled by the words of his son. His anger against Yudhishthira, however, had vanished as soon as he saw his son. He went to Yudhishthira and asked him to pardon him. The blood had now stopped flowing, thanks to the efforts of Draupadi. Yudhishthira said: "I was not angry with you at all. I was worried about your welfare. I did not want this blood of mine to fall on the ground. If it had, you would have been killed at once. But I have averted the calamity. Nothing can happen now". The king could not make out anything of the words of all of them.

Brihannala entered the hall. The king was praising the prowess of his son. The poor prince did not dare to look up and meet the eyes of Arjuna. He said: "Father, I was aided by a divine person. I could not have won but for his help. He defeated them all single-handed". Uttara Kumara related to him all that had happened on the battle-field. Without mentioning the name of Arjuna, he spoke about his valour. The king was amazed to hear about this divine being. He said: "I want to meet this person. I must thank him. I will give him all that I have. I will give my daughter to him. Bring him to me". Uttara Kumara said: "He vanished from my sight. He may appear tomorrow or the day after".

The king thanked Brihannala formally for having driven the chariot for his son. Arjuna left his presence and went to the apartments of the princess. He gave her the silks and jewels which he had brought for her. All the while Arjuna was intrigued by the behaviour of Yudhishthira. When Uttara Kumara was relating to Virata the events that took place on the battle-field, Arjuna had tried to see how Yudhishthira would take it. He tried to catch his eye. But the eldest Pandava

had been keeping his face averted. He would not turn his face in the direction of Arjuna. This was causing him a lot of unhappiness. Arjuna thought of winning a smile of sly mischief from his brother. He could not rest until he knew the real reason for his behaviour. Arjuna went to Bheema and asked him: "Why is Yudhishthira different? He does not look at me with affection as he used to. Is he angry with me because I fought with the Kauravas? I had to". Bheema said: "I cannot explain it. Come, we will go to our brother and ask him". Together they went to Yudhishthira. He saw them and embraced Arjuna warmly. They looked at the wound on his forehead and looked at him questioningly. Yudhishthira said: "Do not think about it now. The king hit me with the dice". He told them everything. He continued: "I was hurt badly. Arjuna, I did not want you to see it when you entered the hall. That was why I kept my face averted" Bheema was very angry. He said: "If only you had shown your anger against this Virata, he would have been dead long ago. Without knowing who you are, he has insulted you. I cannot bear this. We must punish him". Arjuna said: "My lord, your patience has been your undoing all these years. I will kill this man and all his relations. We will then kill all the Kauravas. I am not pleased with your patience. I am going to kill Virata". Bheema said: "Arjuna is right. We will destroy the Matsyas with their relations and their friends. It is because of the spineless behaviour of Virata that Draupadi was harassed by Keechaka. Let us become lords of Matsya first. We can then become lords of the world". Yudhishthira said: "Compose yourselves. There is no need to kill him. He insulted me without knowing who I am. We will give him a chance. We will show him who we are, tomorrow morning. We will occupy the throne. If he dares to defy us then we will kill him. Not till then. Let him realize what he has done. If he is impertinent to me, we will all kill him and his people after that. But not now".

Chapter 21

AFTER THE ECLIPSE, THE FULL MOON

It was a beautiful morning. The five brothers got up early in the morning. They bathed themselves in perfumed water. They dressed themselves in costly robes made of soft silk. They put on gleaming jewels. They went to the court of Virata. Yudhishthira

ascended the throne. Draupadi sat by his side. The four brothers sat all around him. They waited for the king to come. After a while, the king entered the hall with all his attendants. He was followed by his ministers and his many courtiers. He looked at the Pandavas glowing like fire and was amazed at the sight. He looked at Yudhishthira and said: "Kanka, you are the dice player in my court. I had granted you several privileges because I thought that you were an honourable man. It does not mean that you should dress yourself in my silks and sit on my throne. I do not like your behaviour. Explain yourself, if you value your life".

Yudhishthira smiled at the angry king. He said nothing. Arjuna said: "Virata, please be careful. You do not know what you are saying. This man here, is fit to sit with Indra on the same throne. He is the greatest soul that has been born on this earth. He is a lion among kings. He is Yudhishthira, the Pandava. His fame will live in this world as long as the sun rises and sets. This is the king who was surrounded by thousands of kings. The monarchs of the world were waiting on him as servants. He was the lord of Indraprastha. He was the sole monarch of the world. He is the home of truth and righteousness. The great Yudhishthira, the lord of the world, is now honouring your throne by sitting on it. Do you object? You thought that he had no right to sit on your throne. Do you still think so? Tell us".

Virata was speechless with amazement. He stood silent for a few moments. Then he said: "If this is Yudhishthira, where are his brothers? Or rather, who are his brothers? Who is Arjuna? Who is Bheema? Who is Nakula and who is Sahadeva? Is this the fire-born Draupadi? Please tell me and satisfy my curiosity". Arjuna told him who was who. He introduced them all to him. He sang the praises of the twins and that of Bheema. He showed Draupadi to him. Bheema introduced Arjuna to the king. Uttara Kumara came in just then. He said: "Thank God I am free to talk now. I can tell the whole world what happened on the battle-field. It was Arjuna who fought the battle for us, father. I was the charioteer to the great Arjuna". He fell at the feet of the Pandavas and wept tears of joy. The king embraced Arjuna and said: "God has been good to me. He made you save the life of my child". He fell at the feet of Yudhishthira. His form was drenched with tears. He took a chamara from one of the attendants and began to fan Yudhishthira. He washed the feet of Yudhishthira and said: "I am the most fortunate man on this earth. Your presence has graced our city all these months. My court took on a new splendour because of your gracious presence. Please be good enough to accept my kingdom. I am your servant: I am your slave. In your infinite kindness and nobleness you must forgive me for all

the many indignities you had to suffer in my house. You are well-known for your forgiving nature. You must have mercy on me and forgive me".

Yudhishthira took his right hand in his and said: "I am not angry with you. On the other hand, I am very pleased with you. We have been able to spend the most difficult year of our exile happily in your city. I have never enjoyed myself as I did all these months. I have enjoyed this year as I never thought I would. We have all been treated with affection by you. We came to you as strangers. Your gentleness and your noble qualities have won my heart. I am very happy to have you as my dear friend". Virata was grateful to Yudhishthira for his kind words.

Uttara Kumara came up to the throne. He said to his father: "We have been very fortunate in having the sons of Kunti in our midst all these months. They have been honoured by you now. But I have a suggestion. Father, you remember you said that you would please the person who helped me during the fight with the Kauravas? You said that you wanted to give your daughter to him. It is time you fulfil that promise. I will fetch my sister. Please give her to Arjuna, the greatest of all the heroes of the world". The young prince went out and came back with the princess Uttaraa. Virata smiled at Arjuna and said: "Arjuna, this my daughter has been your dear pupil for the last so many months. I will be greatly honoured if you will accept her for wife". He fell at the feet of Yudhishthira and said: "Please forgive us our faults and show me that you have forgiven us, by accepting my child as the bride of your brother". Yudhishthira looked at Arjuna as if to ask him what he should say in reply to the words of Virata.

Arjuna got up from his seat and said: "My lord, we do not want the kingdom of the Matsyas. We want only your assurance that you will give us your support when the war begins. This child, this Uttaraa, has been offered to me. I thank you for your loving thoughts which prompted you to do it. I appreciate it. But I cannot accept her as my bride. My lord, this child has been my student. She has been like a daughter to me. I cannot take her for wife now. It will not be right". He saw disappointment writ on the faces of Virata and Uttara Kumara. He smiled at them and said: "Please do not let this disappoint you. I will still accept her. She has been my daughter all these days and she will still be my daughter. I will be her father. She will become my daughter-in-law. I will accept her as the bride of my child Abhimanyu. He is the son of Subhadra. He is the nephew of Krishna. He will be a fit husband for my favourite student". Arjuna smiled at Uttaraa and took her on his lap. He said: "My child, Uttaraa,

from today you are my daughter". Yudhishthira was pleased with the words of Arjuna.

There arrived in the court of Virata a messenger from Hastinapura. He came to the court of Virata when Yudhishthira was there with his brothers. He said: "These are the words of my king Duryodhana. 'You must prepare yourselves to go to the forest for another twelve years. Arjuna, one of the Pandavas, was seen by us before the expiry of the thirteenth year'. This is the message that has been sent to you". Yudhishthira laughed loud and long. He said: "Go back quickly to your lord, master and king and give him my message: 'Let our revered grandfather Bheeshma say whether the thirteenth year has been completed or not'. In a few days, he will get a message from me. Ask him to be ready to answer that question of mine. Till then, ask him to leave us alone".

Chapter 22

THE WEDDING OF ABHIMANYU

News flew from one end of the world to the other that the Pandavas had come out of their ajnaatavaasa: that their term of exile was over. There was no other topic of conversation. People were everywhere discussing what the behaviour of Duryodhana would be. The Pandavas took for themselves the city called Upaplavya. It belonged to Virata. Yudhishthira sent messengers to all his friends and well-wishers: the first of these being, of course, Krishna and Drupada. They hurried to Upaplavya. Balarama was the first to arrive. He was followed by Krishna who was accompanied by Subhadra and her son Abhimanyu. The meeting between the Pandavas and Krishna was very tender. The host of the Vrishnis had arrived. The Pandavas with Virata went to the outskirts of the city to receive Krishna and Balarama. They fell at their feet. Their eyes swam in tears. They said: "By your grace, Krishna, we have finished the thirteen years. You are our lord and friend. We are in your hands. You are our refuge. We will do what you want us to do. We have no mind of our own. We are yours and you are ours. You mean everything to us".

Krishna was overcome with emotion when he looked at his dear, dear cousins. His tears flowed like a river. Draupadi was as much upset as he was. They could not talk for a long time. Tears choked

their voices. They stood silent. Krishna took the hands of Draupadi and lifted her up. He dried her tears with his fingers. He said: "No, Draupadi. Do not weep. The time for tears is over. Smile now. The day is near when your smile can come back to your face. Dry your lovely eyes. I will set about fulfilling the promise I gave you in the Kamyaka forest thirteen years back. The sickness in your heart will be cured soon".

They entered Upaplavya. All the kings who loved Yudhishthira had come there. They were all pleased that they were meeting Yudhishthira and his brothers after the thirteen years of exile. They were glad that Virata had been their host for one year. The marriage of Abhimanyu was to be celebrated soon. All the kings stayed on to attend the wedding.

The wedding was celebrated with great joy. Young Abhimanyu looked like his father and his uncle Krishna. He was the most handsome bridegroom that ever sat before the sacred fire. The bride was a perfect mate for this young lion. They made a beautiful pair as they sat before the sacred fire. Dhaumya was the officiating priest for the Pandavas. Krishna and Arjuna sat side by side smiling often at each other. The city of Virata was like heaven on earth. The marriage was a fitting end to their years of pain. It made them forget the past few years. It made them forget all that. They did not remember the pain of the past so many years in the joy of seeing their child happy. It was a delicious moment which they enjoyed as much as they could since they knew that it was just a respite. Great things were waiting to be discussed. The future of Bharatavarsha hung in the balance.

But that was all for tomorrow. Today was the wedding day of their dear child Abhimanyu. They refused to think of anything except the love light in the eye of Abhimanyu and the shy response in the eyes of Uttaraa.

The guests who had come to attend the wedding were there with their armies. They had all come there to assure Yudhishthira that their army was at his disposal. Drupada, the sons of Draupadi, Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandin, were all there. The cousins of Krishna, Kritavarma and Satyaki were there.

Draupadi and Subhadra were the queens in the palace. Sudeshna was now the maid in attendance. The palace of the king looked like the home of Indra. The Pandavas were very happy. Balarama and Krishna were shining there in the hall like the sun and the moon. All the others were but stars in attendance. Great was the happiness in the heart of everyone during the days of the wedding of Abhimanyu.

UDYOGA PARVA

Chapter 1

THE COUNCIL HALL IN VIRATA

The wedding celebrations were all over. The Pandavas knew that there was now no more time to be wasted in this false sense of security. They knew that they had to discuss their future plans with their friends who had come to wish them happiness. The assembly hall was now filled with the lions of Bharatavarsha. It was morning. Everyone went early to the great hall of the king in the city of Virata. Drupada and Virata were the first to enter. They were the veterans of the group. By the side of Drupada were seated Balarama and Satyaki. Very near King Virata were seated Yudhishthira and Krishna. Near them sat the sons of Draupadi, Bheema, Nakula, Sahadeva, Arjuna, the sons of Krishna, Pradyumna and Samba. The newly wed Abhimanyu sat near his uncle and father. The hall was a splendid setting for this galaxy of princes.

They spent some time in talking on indifferent matters. Finally the talk veered round to the subject which was uppermost in their hearts: the future of the Pandavas and the fate of the entire world. Krishna got up from his seat and stood smiling. A hush fell on the audience. They waited in silence.

Krishna began to speak. He said: "You are not strangers to the events that led to the exile of the noble prince Yudhishthira, accompanied by his illustrious brothers and Draupadi, their dear queen. Still, just to refresh your memories I will recount the circumstances. The deceitful Sakuni defeated Yudhishthira in a game of dice. He took from him his kingdom and all his belongings. The Pandavas were made to spend twelve years in the forest and one year in hiding. Their period of exile is now over.

"Though it would have been easy for them to defeat Duryodhana in a fight, the righteous-minded Pandavas did not adopt that course. They believe only in Truth. They will never swerve from the path of Dharma. They preferred to spend the twelve years in the forest and one in Virata according to the conditions specified. They have passed through dreadful times. They have undergone so much of suffering. This also is known to all of you. Now that the time of reckoning has come, it is up to all of you to decide on the future course of action of the Pandavas. It must be to the good of all mankind. It must not be harmful to anyone. Let us all try and find out a way which will be

beneficial to the Pandavas as well as to Duryodhana. It must be in accordance to Dharma. It must bring fame to everyone. It must not hurt the reputation of the Pandavas and their honour.

"The noble Yudhishthira will forego the kingdom rather than be unrighteous. He would rather live like a mendicant in a hovel than with a kingdom won by unfair means. This kingdom of the Kurus belongs to him. He has inherited it as his birthright. King Dhritarashtra knew this. That is why he gave him one half of the kingdom. The half which was originally Khandavaprastha was given to our Yudhishthira. It was later called Indraprastha by the Pandavas. This kingdom was magnified by the valour of the brothers of Yudhishthira. He performed the great Rajasuya and was acclaimed to be the sole monarch of the entire world. This beautiful land, this, I say, was taken away from him by Dhritarashtra's son. Arjuna was not defeated in any fair war; none of the sons of Dhritarashtra used his strength of arms in conquering the kingdom of Yudhishthira. The Pandavas were not given a fair chance at all. But this saint among men did not complain. He has never complained. Even when they were young children in the court of Hastinapura, they had been ill-treated by the Kaurava children. I need not tell you about the infamous plot hatched at Varanavata. You know all about it. Even then Yudhishthira did not complain. It is against his nature to talk ill of others.

"Considering all these things, considering the injustice done to these heroes, considering the wickedness and crookedness of their cousins in Hastinapura, considering their avarice as against the selflessness of this prince among men, considering that we are all the well-wishers and friends of the Pandava princes, it is now very necessary to do something definite about this injustice. Steps must be taken to right this wrong done to Yudhishthira. I invite opinions from all the great personages assembled here. The Kauravas deserve to be killed. The Pandavas could have killed them long ago. But Yudhishthira and his brothers are righteous people. Yudhishthira does not like war. But, if their kingdom is not restored to them even after they have fulfilled the conditions of the second game of dice, the Pandavas will have to wage war against the Kaurava host. Yudhishthira has many friends who will rally round his banner and lay down their lives for him if it is a question of war with the Kauravas.

"However, the intentions of Duryodhana are not known to us. Without a knowledge of his ideas, it is not possible to decide on the future course of action. I have a suggestion. Let some high-born person be sent to Hastinapura. Let him talk on behalf of Yudhishthira. Let him ask King Duryodhana in gentle words for the half of the kingdom which is the due of Yudhishthira. If there are any more sug-

gestions, we are all eager to hear them". Krishna sat down after speaking in this gentle yet powerful and impartial manner.

Balarama got up. Everyone looked at this handsome elder brother of Krishna who looked charming in the blue silk he was wearing. He looked at them all and said: "You have all heard the words of my brother, Krishna. He spoke words full of Dharma and full of meaning. His speech was impartial. It spoke well of our Yudhishthira and I was pleased to note that it was not in any way disparaging to Duryodhana. The Pandavas want only their share of the kingdom. They want only half the Kuru land. They do not want the entire kingdom. I think the sons of Dhritarashtra should be thankful to Yudhishthira for this noble gesture on his part. The war can be averted if they take advantage of this chance to behave magnanimously. As my brother suggested, some responsible person should be sent to Hastinapura. He must go with the intention of pacifying Duryodhana. He must plead the cause of Yudhishthira. He must first salute the elders of the Kaurava court: the great Bheeshma, Dhritarashtra, the famous son of the Kuru House, Drona, his son Aswatthama, Vidura and Kripa. He must talk respectfully to Sakuni and to Radheya. He must be very polite to Duryodhana and his powerful brothers. This messenger must be very humble, and explain the views of Yudhishthira very gently. He must not antagonise Duryodhana. The king must not be provoked.

"Yudhishthira reigned on his throne. He forgot himself in the excitement of playing and lost his kingdom to Duryodhana. He did a foolish thing. He was repeatedly dissuaded from playing by all the Kauravas. But he would not listen. He is a poor player. He has no skill in the game. But he challenged Sakuni who is an adept at the game. There were there thousands of dice players whom he could have defeated easily. He did not choose any of them as his opponent. Yudhishthira challenged only Sakuni. He was defeated again and again. Even then he played. For this foolishness of the king of Indraprastha, it is no use blaming Sakuni or Duryodhana. Since such is the state of things, let the messenger use humble words to coax Dhritarashtra and Duryodhana to part with half the kingdom. It will not be wise or judicious to antagonise Duryodhana. War must be averted. This can be done only in a diplomatic manner, and that needs a very diplomatic and clever envoy".

This speech of Balarama was certainly provoking to all the friends of Yudhishthira. When the Pandavas had been to Prabhasa during their Teerthayatra days, the words of Balarama were not like these. He was then for fighting with the sinful sons of Dhritarashtra even before the thirteen years were over. It was obvious to Yudhishthira that he had

had a talk with Duryodhana after that. Duryodhana must have given his own version of the game of dice to Balarama. He must have misrepresented the facts to him. Balarama was very fond of Duryodhana and he was only too willing to believe all that he had been told. It was known to the whole world that Sakuni taunted Yudhishthira to a game and it was Sakuni who would not let him go without playing. Once the game began, of course, Yudhishthira lost his head. But this misrepresentation of facts was just the sort of thing to be expected of the Kauravas. Duryodhana knew that Balarama had a soft corner for him. It was easy for him to convince Balarama that the Kauravas were not to blame as far as the loss of the kingdom was concerned. Credulous Balarama thought that Duryodhana was not in the least responsible for that. Yudhishthira did not speak a word.

Balarama was talking. He had not yet finished his speech. In the middle of it, Satyaki sprang up from his seat. He spoke in an angry voice. He said: "A man's soul is mirrored forth in his words. From your talk we can see into your heart of hearts. There are, in this world, brave men and cowards too. Men can be classified as belonging to one or the other of the two types. From the same family can be born two types of men. Out of the same tree grow branches with fruits and without fruits. I am not so upset by your words as by the silence of these people who are listening to you without protesting. I cannot understand how any one can think that Yudhishthira is to blame; and how such a person is allowed to talk in this large assembly. You dare to attach blame to the name of this saint among men. And you dare to think that your statements will pass unchallenged.

"How can it be said that the Kauravas won the game by fair means, when it is known that Yudhishthira is not a skilful player and, knowing that, they challenged him to play and they won? If the game had been played in the house of the king at Indraprastha, if the Kauravas had been invited by Yudhishthira and his brothers to Indraprastha for a game of dice, if they had then played and won, their winning could have been called fair. But the facts are different. The Kauravas summoned Yudhishthira to Hastinapura. There, they challenged him, a kshatriya, to play. He just *had* to play. And in that game he lost everything. They took his everything from him. Do you call that princely behaviour on the part of Duryodhana? Yudhishthira has complied with all the conditions of the exile. He has lived these thirteen years as he promised to. His father's kingdom is due to him. Why should he not demand it? Why should he ask for it humbly? Why should he demean himself and use soft words lest Duryodhana become angry? Even if he is in the wrong, Yudhishthira need not go and beg a favour of that Duryodhana. But we know that he is not in the wrong,

not one bit. He has been wronged most cruelly by his cousins. Think of the righteousness of your dear beloved Duryodhana. He knows full well that the period of their exile is over: and yet he sends a messenger with the words: 'Arjuna has been seen by us. So you must go back to the forest for another twelve years'. Do you call that righteous? At the time of the beginning of the exile of the Pandavas, he was requested by Vidura not to be so cruel. He asked him to return their kingdom to them. But your dear pupil was adamant. He is the most avaricious person on the face of this earth.

"I have a feeling that these messages and messengers will all be able to achieve nothing. It is just a waste of time. I know Duryodhana. Let *me* be the messenger to Hastinapura. I will fight with that man. I will wound him with my sharp arrows. I will drag him by force to the presence of Yudhishthira and toss him at his feet. If they refuse to prostrate before Yudhishthira, I will send all of them to the abode of death. They will not be able to face the angry Satyaki when he makes up his mind to destroy them.

"Really, is there any one who can withstand the great Arjuna or Krishna or me? Who can stand up against Bheema? Who is there who can fight with Nakula and Sahadeva, who will look like messengers of death? Who is strong enough to fight with the sons of Drupada, Sikhandi and the fire-born Dhrishtadyumna? Think of these five Pandavas and their son Abhimanyu. They will have with them Gada, Pradyumna, Samba and myself. Who can fight against this team of thunderbolts? We will all of us kill the sons of Dhritarashtra and we will kill Radheya and Sakuni and the whole sinful crowd. We will perform the coronation of Yudhishthira. The Kauravas are terrible sinners who are bent on destroying the Pandavas. No sin will come to us if we kill them. I know what is in the mind of Yudhishthira. He knows that Duryodhana will not return the kingdom to him. Either the sons of Dhritarashtra must return the kingdom immediately to Yudhishthira or they must be killed in the war and made to sleep on the field of battle. This your suggestion that Yudhishthira must beg Duryodhana for what belongs to him is insulting to the greatness of our king and to the valour of all of us who are ready to fight for him".

This impassioned speech of Satyaki won the approval of all of them. Yudhishthira looked with affection at Satyaki whose blood boiled so easily at the insult directed towards himself. Krishna smiled at him and at Arjuna. Satyaki's bosom was still heaving. His eyes were still red like copper. He glared at Balarama and bit his lips. His lips were still throbbing with wrath.

Drupada got up. He said: "What Satyaki says is the truth. Duryodhana will never return the kingdom without a war being fought.

That is certain. The old king Dhritarashtra is lost in his son. Bheeshma and Drona will surely be foolish enough to side with Duryodhana. Radheya and Sakuni are, of course, on his side. The words of Balarama are not pleasing to me. Soft words should not be used when we talk to Duryodhana. He is steeped in sin. I feel gentleness is the wrong thing to be employed. When we handle cows and bullocks we must be harsh. If we are gentle in our talk, Duryodhana will think that we are afraid. He will never be able to understand the motives which prompt us to be gentle. He will think that the Pandavas are weak and hence unwilling to fight with him. We will send an ambassador to the court of Duryodhana, of course. But the most important thing is not that. The more important thing is to send messengers to the kings who are our friends. A great event is waiting in the womb of time. It will be born any moment. We must prepare ourselves for it. Let Yudhishthira send word to all his friends: Salya, Dhrishtaketu and Jayatsena. Let the Kekaya brothers be approached for support. We must hurry. Duryodhana will also be sending messengers to these. Good people always agree to help the person who comes to them first. We must forestall Duryodhana. We must approach Bhagadatta, and so many other great warriors. We must make sure of their support. As for the envoy to Hastinapura, I will send my family priest. He is a good man born of a noble family. Let him be advised as to how he should approach the Kauravas, Duryodhana, Bheeshma, Dhritarashtra and Drona. I have a feeling that this will be the most sensible thing to do".

Krishna approved of the wisdom of Drupada. He said: "The words of Drupada are wise and full of meaning. They are full of feeling for the cause of the Pandavas. He has great foresight and he has military genius. It is good that he has given a frank opinion about the possible behaviour of Duryodhana. As for us, we are equally related to the Pandavas and the Kauravas. We have been invited to attend the wedding of our beloved nephew Abhimanyu. Now that the wedding celebrations are over, we wish to return to our Dwaraka. The good king Virata has honoured us. We feel very happy. We are all his disciples and he is our preceptor. That is how I feel when I look at him. The old war veteran Drupada has now taken charge of the entire situation. I feel that a great load has been lifted off my mind. The words of Drupada will certainly be respected by Bheeshma, Drona, Kripa and Dhritarashtra. He will send his family priest to Hastinapura with proper instructions. I am certain about that. Let us all hope that this enmity between the Kauravas and the Pandavas will be brought to an end by the intervention of Drupada. If that does happen, a great calamity, a great destruction, can be averted. If, however, blinded by power, the proud and obstinate Duryodhana refuses to see

reason, then Yudhishthira, send for us: all of us. We will then see this foolish Duryodhana and all his associates meet with their fate at the hands of Arjuna and the wrathful Bheema".

Virata honoured the guests from Dwaraka and bade them adieu. Then began the preparations for war. Yudhishthira and Virata were busy sending messengers to the different parts of Bharatavarsha, asking for help and support in the war that threatened to break out any moment now. Many of the kings hurried to the cities of Virata and Upaplavya with their armies. Duryodhana heard from his spies about the arrival of several kings in Matsya to help Yudhishthira. He began his preparations too. His friends were many. The earth was covered by the marching troops: some in the direction of Matsya and some in the direction of Hastinapura.

Chapter 2

ARJUNA AND DURYODHANA IN DWARAKA

Drupada sent his own priest to the court of Hastinapura. This brahmin was a high-born person. He would not cringe in the presence of royalty. He was used to living with kings. He knew how to conduct himself in a dignified manner. Drupada gave him the instructions which were necessary. He said: "You are a wise man. I have every confidence in you. You know all the circumstances. You know all about the injustice done to our Yudhishthira. You know too, all about the Kauravas. Dhritarashtra knows how unfair has been the treatment meted out to the five Pandavas. Still, though he has been advised again and again by Vidura, he listens only to his son's words. Sakuni, of course, is the evil genius of the young Duryodhana. Having gone thus far in their journey towards death, the Kauravas will not be willing to give up their kingdom to Yudhishthira. You must, therefore, address your words to Dhritarashtra. He may, perhaps, allow himself to be led in the right path. Vidura will also add his words of advice to yours. Your words may not influence Dhritarashtra. But they may, to a certain extent, work on the minds of the righteous-minded Bheeshma, Drona and Kripa.

"I will now tell you my purpose in sending you to Hastinapura. When your words work on the minds of the others, they will be upset. They will feel ashamed of their supporting Duryodhana. When his fighters are upset by the wrong action they are forced to do, Duryo-

dhana will have to spend some time in winning their hearts back and their allegiance too. This respite is essential for the Pandavas. They can easily concentrate on the assembling of armies, which will help them. We can then win to our side powerful princes who may join Duryodhana if they are approached earlier by him.

"Dhritarashtra *may* be convinced by your arguments. I have my own doubts. But still, the miracle may happen and he may be overcome with pity for the sons of his dead brother if their sufferings are placed before him vividly. You must use your discretion. Do not let your talk have any pleading in it. Just state the facts. The elders may feel ashamed of their course of action if you stress on the contrast between their actions and those of their fore-fathers. Their minds must be confused. They must reconsider their behaviour. That is my aim. The time, which Duryodhana will have to spend in convincing them and in bringing them back to his way of thinking, will be very precious to us. We can achieve a lot during this respite granted to us. I think this is the best thing to be done under the circumstances. I depend on you to do everything according to the rules of Dharma and fair-play".

The ambassador had been sent to Hastinapura. In the meantime, the Pandavas with Drupada and Virata were busy sending messengers to all the powerful kings asking them to side with the Pandavas in the war, if there should be a war. Arjuna went to Dwaraka to ask for the help of Krishna. The spies of Duryodhana told him about this journey of Arjuna to Dwaraka. Duryodhana was advised by Sakuni to forestall Arjuna. Duryodhana accordingly left on the fastest steeds he could collect. He arrived in Dwaraka just before Arjuna. Arjuna came some time later. They both met in the lobby adjoining the apartments of Krishna. Duryodhana was happy that he had come first. He smiled at Arjuna and said: "We both seem to have had the same hope in our minds when we tried to reach Dwaraka quickly Evidently, I am more fortunate than you. I have come sooner than you. It is but right that Krishna should help me since I came first". Arjuna said: "It is not important whether we come first or last. We must wait and see whom Krishna is willing to support. We have both arrived. It is up to the one who metes out our deserts to decide about everything. I am just not worried". Satyaki came there and said: "Krishna is sleeping. If you both wait until he gets up, you can meet him". He looked daggers at Arjuna as if to say: "Look, what have you done. Could you not have come earlier? You have gone and spoilt everything by allowing this hateful person to ask Krishna first". Arjuna smiled at him and passed into the apartments of Krishna. Duryodhana entered and he preceded Arjuna. Krishna

was sleeping. Duryodhana walked proudly to the cot and sat on a beautifully made seat which was placed at the head of the cot. Arjuna, who had followed Duryodhana, went to the foot of the bed and stood at the feet of Krishna with his hands folded and his eyes closed. His mind was serene. He was in the presence of Krishna. How could disturbing thoughts come to his mind?

Krishna woke up from his sleep. His eyes rested on Arjuna. He got up after smiling at Arjuna. He became aware of the presence of someone else. He twisted his body and looked in the direction of the head of the cot. He saw Duryodhana. He received them both with words full of affection. He wanted to know the reason for their coming. Duryodhana spoke in his fine powerful voice. He said: "Krishna, you know how it is with us, cousins. We will most probably fight for this ancient throne of the Pauravas. We are busy collecting allies and armies. I have come to you to request you to help us in the war by taking up our side". He paused. Krishna bent his questioning eyes on Arjuna. He nodded his head as if to say: "Yes, my lord, I have come too, to ask you to help us". Duryodhana continued. He said: "Krishna, you are as much our friend as you are to the Pandavas. Your relationship to the Pandavas and to the Kauravas is the same. I came to you first, Krishna. It is but right that you should give preference to the first-comer. You are the greatest of the great. It will not be nice if you do not follow the path of Dharma. You must grant me the privilege since I have come first to you". With a look of triumph Duryodhana sat smiling as though his wish had been granted already. If Krishna should become their champion, the Pandavas would do nothing. They were helpless without Krishna. It would not surprise him if the Pandavas agreed to go back to the forest rather than fight against Krishna. Thoughts like these chased each other in his mind.

As if he divined his thoughts, Krishna spoke gently. He said: "Duryodhana, I quite believe you when you say that you came to me first. It does not need any repeated assertions to make me believe it. I do believe you. Of course you came to me first. But I am caught in a terrible dilemma. I was sleeping when you both came. I knew nothing of the coming of either of you. When I got up, my eyes chanced to fall on Arjuna first. You came to me first: I saw Arjuna first. Hence I think it is but right that I should help you both. You will have to choose. Since, in any choice, the younger of two must be allowed to choose first, I will ask Arjuna to choose first. I feel that I am doing the right thing". They both agreed to his suggestion. Krishna continued: "I have an army composed of terrible warriors who are my equals in valour. They are called the Narayanas. They

make up an Akshauhini. That will be one of the alternatives. On the other hand, you have me, just me. I will not fight. I have decided not to carry a single weapon. Now you have both the alternatives before you. Arjuna, you had better think well before you make your choice. You have the army consisting of one Akshauhini on the one hand and on the other, a weaponless, non-fighting Krishna". He smiled at both of them and waited for Arjuna to speak.

Arjuna fell at the feet of Krishna. His eyes were blind with tears. He took Krishna's right hand in his and said: "You, my lord, I want you. I do not want anything else in this world. I want you". Duryodhana was very happy to get the large army from Krishna. He felt that, without the army, and without the weapons, Krishna could not be of much help to the Pandavas. They were as good as defeated. He thanked Krishna profusely and left his presence after taking leave of him. A strange smile lit up the corners of Krishna's lips as he watched him and his happiness.

Duryodhana went to the presence of Balarama and spoke to him. Balarama said: "My dear Duryodhana, you must have heard from your spies that I spoke in favour of you in the assembly at the city of Virata. Later, I chided my brother for taking the side of the Pandavas. I tried to make him realise that we are equally related to both the parties. But Satyaki and Krishna are not impartial. They have gone against me. Now you tell me that Krishna is siding with the Pandavas. I am sorry to hear that. I cannot live without Krishna even for a moment. I cannot side with you and fight with my brother who is part of me. I have told Krishna already that I will not take sides in this war. I am sorry. I cannot fight. As for you, you are born in the illustrious family of the great Kurus. You have been a great favourite of mine. You are brave, valiant and proud. Go and fight in a manner suited to your rank and race and becoming a true Kshatriya. Do not bring shame on the house of which you are an ornament".

Duryodhana embraced his guru. He left the presence of Balarama with tears in his eyes. Balarama felt very sorry for this unfortunate toy of fate. He knew full well what the fate of this prince would be. When Krishna decided to side with the Pandavas the fate of Duryodhana was sealed. But the wheel of Time moved on, relentlessly. No one could stop its course. The earth was doomed. The moment Arjuna chose him, Krishna became the master of ceremonies. Balarama saw it all with his inner eye. He knew it was no use thinking about it. With a shrug of impatience, Balarama called for his bowl of wine.

CHAPTER 3

KRISHNA—THE CHARIOTEER OF ARJUNA

After Duryodhana had left, Krishna asked Arjuna: "It is a foolish thing you have done, my friend! Why did you have to go and choose me, weaponless as I am, against my powerful army? Your mind has become clouded by the recent happenings. I think it is a senseless thing you have done". Arjuna laughed loud and long. He said: "My lord, what do I care what happens in the war? What do I care who fights on whose side? We want you. You have been our guide, our friend. Do you think I do not know you? You are trying to test me. I want you to take the reins of my white horses. With you as my charioteer, if I enter the field of battle, then the world will know, will see, how Dharma will be established on this sinful world. My lord, it will not be a whip which you will be holding in your blessed hand. It will be the sceptre of Dharma. You are, my lord, Dharma itself, taking the form of man, to the great glory of the Pandavas. I will be known in aftertimes as the man whom the Lord steered through the battle-field. My name will become immortal, because you will be called Parthasarathi.

"When the reins of my horses are in your hands, why should I worry? The reins of the chariot of life will be in your hands. Why should I worry about death? In this storm-ridden life of ours, we have been like a boat caught in the gale. You will be the one to man it to the shore. We have you. Where there is Dharma, there is victory; and where Krishna is, there is Dharma. We know it well. Please do not tease me. I know you. I want you. I have you. There is nothing else that I desire in this world. You will plough this land called Bharatavarsha. You will soak it deep with the blood of lusty kshatriyas. On this land you are going to sow the seeds of Dharma, Truth, and Kindliness. Because of you, this earth is to be cured of the poisons which are trying to choke the life out of her. Spring will be greener because of you. The rain clouds will be darker because of you. The tints of autumn will be more golden because of you. Winter will be purer because of you. I am happy because you will be with us for ever and for ever. These enemies of ours will be killed by you single-handed, or even by me for that matter. That is beside the point. The world will know that Krishna sided with the Pandavas. That is all I want".

Krishna was very pleased with the words of Arjuna. He took him

by his right hand and led him inside the palace. Satyaki was waiting for them anxiously. Krishna smiled at him and told him all the events of the past hour. He said: "Look, Satyaki, this Arjuna took my right hand in his and invited defeat for himself". With a sigh of relief Satyaki said: "Thank God, everything has turned out according to our wishes. If you only knew how wild I was with Arjuna for his coming here after Duryodhana!" There was a moment's silence. Then Satyaki said: "Duryodhana has now gone to Balarama. Krishna, what if Balarama agrees to side with him? Kritavarma has already told me that he is going to take sides with Duryodhana". Krishna said: "Satyaki, do not worry. Balarama has decided to stay away from the battle-field. He is not going to fight. He tried to dissuade me from joining the Pandavas. But I was adamant. He is displeased with me but—that is the important thing—he is not going to fight".

After a few moments Krishna said: "I can see Sakuni's crafty brain behind this haste of our friend Duryodhana. Sakuni knows that my friendship is very necessary for the Kauravas. He has therefore sent Duryodhana to me. But this simple man does not know that he has been granted the skin of the fruit and that Arjuna has got the kernel. It is all the work of fate. I am glad I was saved the embarrassment of saying 'nay' to Duryodhana, by the timely presence of Arjuna. If I had not seen Arjuna first, I do not know what I would have done". Satyaki said: "I know what you would have done. You would have told him that you have already decided to help the Pandavas; that you have not approved of the actions of the sons of the old blind king. You were spared the speaking of these frank words, that is all. I know you, Krishna".

Krishna smiled and said: "Today everyone seems to know me except me. Arjuna says 'I know you', and now you say 'I know you'. And earlier in the day my lord Balarama and I were discussing the war. He said: 'I know you, Krishna. You are bent on seeing this war fought. You have decided on the death of Duryodhana and Radheya. I do not want to fight against you. I cannot have it. I do not care what happens to the Pandavas or the Kauravas for that matter. I am only sorry for Duryodhana. He is a good boy. It is that awful father of his, who has brought him to this state. He has many noble qualities. But all that is not going to be remembered by the world of men. They will remember only this game of dice and the exile of the Pandavas. I wish someone like me had gone to Hastinapura to make him give up the kingdom to Yudhishthira. The wrong person has been sent. Anyway, the DICE IS CAST once again. This time, it is loaded against the Kauravas. Sakuni once wielded the treacherous dice. This time the loaded dice will be wielded by you, Krishna. It is as treacherous

as that wielded by Sakuni. The fates of poor Duryodhana and Radheya are known to me. You are going to play a game with these kshatriyas as your pawns. I know what is going to happen. I know you, Krishna. Let us not discuss it any more. I am going to stay away from this war.' Satyaki, Balarama is not happy at all. But I do not agree with him. It is not right to stand by and watch an injustice being done. There are times when active interference is necessary. The sons of the sinful Dhritarashtra must not be allowed to continue like this. The time of reckoning has come. They have got to suffer for their sins. I am not sorry for them. It is true, what Balarama says. It is true that this one fault of Duryodhana has eclipsed all his good qualities. But that does not mean that Yudhishthira, the noblest among men, should suffer, and suffer for ever. What Duryodhana has done to the Pandavas and to the proud Draupadi cannot go unpunished. Bheema's oath cannot become false. These things have been predestined. It is up to us to see that the Pandavas win this war. The thought of war is as hateful to me as it is to Yudhishthira. I will try my best to avert it. But I know that all my attempts will fail. Still, I am going to try. But now, let us go to Upaplavya. Yudhishthira will be waiting very eagerly for our coming".

CHAPTER 4

EIGHTEEN AKSHAUHINIS

Salya heard that the Pandavas had finished their exile. He was planning to go and see them. Even as he was considering this, messengers from Yudhishthira reached his kingdom. Yudhishthira had asked him to side with him during the war which seemed inevitable. Salya was only too happy to help his nephews. He left his city with an army made up of one Akshauhini. He was accompanied by his powerful sons. He started for Upaplavya.

Duryodhana heard that Salya had begun his march towards Upaplavya. He decided to please the great warrior. He made arrangements for the army to rest on the way in various spots. He erected camps for their comfort, camps which were supplied with refreshments and entertainments which were sure to please the king of Madra. Duryodhana was very thoughtful about the comforts of Salya, who was entertained as though he was Indra. Salya was very pleased and flattered. He thought that all these arrangements were made by

Yudhishthira. He sent for the servants who had made the arrangements and said: "Where are the agents of my nephew Yudhishthira who have taken so much trouble? I would like to meet them and reward them for this. Please ask them to appear before me so that I may show my great appreciation". The servants did not know what they should say to this. They went to Duryodhana and told him everything. He saw that Salya was so very pleased that he would give even his life to show his appreciation. Duryodhana thought that it was time he revealed himself to Salya.

Duryodhana went to the camp of Salya and announced himself. It was a great surprise to Salya when he saw that Duryodhana was responsible for everything. He was very pleased with him. He embraced him and said: "I said that I will reward the person who has taken such good care of me. My word stands. What can I do to show you my pleasure?" Duryodhana said: "Only one thing can please me, my lord. I am falling at your feet asking for a boon. Please side with me and help me in this war". Poor Salya did not know what to say. He had given his word. He had to keep it. He said: "My nephews Nakula and Sahadeva, with the noble Yudhishthira, sent for me. I came with my army to help them. But you have won my heart with this your love for me. I will please you. I will take up your side and I will fight with my nephews. But first, I must go to Yudhishthira and explain everything to him. I want to see him and give him my blessings. He has passed through many hardships. I must go and greet him". It was not possible for King Duryodhana to prevent this. He said: "Certainly. It is but right that you should go. But please come back soon and please do not forget your promise". Salya said: "I will not forget. You can go back to your city. I will see my dear nephews and then I will come to you".

Salya went to Upaplavya and met the Pandavas. Yudhishthira came to him and prostrated before him. Then came the other brothers Salya embraced them all and said: "I am happy to find you all safe and well after the terrible thirteen years. I am glad to see the proud Draupadi safe and well". They sat together and spoke about the recent events. Salya gently broke to them the news about his promise to Duryodhana. Yudhishthira was greatly disappointed. But he was very fair-minded. He said: "I quite understand your granting this boon to Duryodhana in the fullness of your heart. It befits a noble man like you. You can certainly go back to the Kaurava camp. It is unfortunate that we have to fight our own uncle because of this war". Yudhishthira's eyes became filled with tears. Salya was very unhappy of his own rash promise which now made him fight with the sons of his dead sister. His heart was heavy. He said: "I wish this had not

happened. You know how much I love you all. I am now bound to do a thing which I have not the heart to do". Yudhishthira said: "There is one thing you can do to help us. You need not leave Duryodhana and come to us. That is not what I have in mind. I am also asking a favour of you. As my uncle you must grant me that". Salya said: "Certainly. I will try to make up for this unfortunate happening". Yudhishthira said: "When I think of the war, I am not worried about anyone except Radheya. He has always been my Arjuna's rival. When the fight between Arjuna and Radheya takes place, you will be asked to be his charioteer. You are the equal of Krishna in the art of driving a chariot in the battle-field. When the fateful duel is to be fought between Radheya and Arjuna, you must protect the life of my Arjuna. If you are really fond of us, you must dampen the enthusiasm of Radheya. That will have a lot of effect on his mental condition. He must be compared to Arjuna and you must make out that Arjuna is the better warrior. I know that this is a very improper thing that I am asking you to do, but you must do it. I am so afraid of Radheya". Salya said: "Yudhishthira, I promise to do my best to help Arjuna during the duel between the two rivals. I will deride Radheya and make him lose his confidence. You can be sure of my help. The sufferings of the sons of Pandu and those of Draupadi must not go unavenged. Your days of suffering will soon be over. You will rule the earth and I bless you wholeheartedly. You will win this war". Salya left the Pandavas and went to Hastinapura. His heart was heavy. He was fond of the Pandavas and it did not please him to fight against them.

The allies had begun to arrive on either side. Many went to Upaplavya. The first to come was Satyaki with his one Akshauhini. The next was Dhrishtaketu, the king of the Chedis, with one Akshauhini. The next arrival was Jayatsena, the son of Jarasandha, with one Akshauhini. The next to come were the five Kekaya brothers with one Akshauhini. Drupada came next. He had one Akshauhini with him. He was accompanied by his sons Sikhandi, Dhrishtadyumna and the sons of Draupadi. Virata brought one Akshauhini. His sons and brothers were with him. The king of Pandya and Neela, the king of Mahishmati, came with their armies. The assorted armies made up one Akshauhini. So, altogether, the Pandavas could command seven Akshauhinis. Their army covered the earth. It looked as though the sea had forgotten the boundary imposed on it and entered the land.

Hastinapura was becoming filled by the armies of the allies of Duryodhana. Bhagadatta, with one Akshauhini was the first to arrive. Then came Salya with one Akshauhini. Bhoorisravas, Kritavarma, Jayadratha, Sudakshina the king of Kambhoja, Vinda and Anuvinda,

the Avanti brothers, each brought one Akshauhini. There were many others, whose armies totalled up to three Akshauhinis. Altogether, Duryodhana had eleven Akshauhinis as against the seven of the Pandavas.

Hastinapura and Virata were now crowded with these mighty armies. The Kaurava army was stationed along the banks of the river Ganga.

CHAPTER 5

DHRITARASHTRA'S REPLY TO YUDHISHTHIRA

The brahmin who had been sent to the court of Hastinapura reached the city. He went to the court of Dhritarashtra. Hearing that he had been sent on behalf of the Pandavas, Bheeshma, Vidura and Dhritarashtra received him with all honours. They were very solicitous about his comforts. They were very hospitable. He met them all in the great council hall where they had assembled to hear him speak. He said: "This is a great assembly. It is peopled by men who have known what the meaning of righteousness is. You all know the rules that bind a kshatriya and a king. You all know about the rights of kings also. It is known the world over that this king Dhritarashtra and Pandu are both the sons of the same father. This kingdom is the birthright of both of them. There is no doubt about it. Now the sons of Dhritarashtra have their kingdom. How is it that the sons of Pandu are not allowed to have theirs? The sons of Dhritarashtra have taken it all. They have tried again and again to kill the sons of Pandu. However, they were unable to do so. Their attempts did not meet with success. The Pandavas managed to get a kingdom of their own and they expanded it by their own efforts. This was taken away from them by the deceit practised by Duryodhana and Sakuni. This is also known to the elders of this court. Actually, it was countenanced by them. They and their dear queen Draupadi were made to suffer the greatest indignities in this same court. The Pandavas were made to spend twelve years in the forest and one year in hiding. The twelve years they spent with great difficulty. The thirteenth year had to be spent in menial service. The Pandavas do not want to remember all this. They want their half of the kingdom. It is up to the righteous-minded elders of this court to coax Duryodhana to render unto Yudhishthira what is his. The noble Yudhishthira wants only his half of the

kingdom. He does not want a war. He is not for the destruction of the entire race of kshatriyas.

"If, however, there is to be a war, because of this avarice of Duryodhana, the Pandavas want it to be known that they are not without help. Yudhishthira has seven Akshauhinis at his disposal. Several kings are prepared to lay down their lives for his sake. They have Satyaki, Bheema, Nakula, Sahadeva. There is Arjuna who is greater than Indra himself. He has Krishna as his charioteer and his friend. Please make Duryodhana give them back their kingdom. Or else, ask him to be ready to face the anger of the Pandavas".

Bheeshma listened to the words of the ambassador. He said: "Indeed I am glad to hear that the Pandavas are well, that they have Krishna for their friend, that they have a number of kings to help them, that in spite of their power they are bent on the observance of Dharma and the general good of the world. I am happy to know that Yudhishthira is very keen on peace. What your honoured self has said so far is the truth. There is no doubt about it. You are a brahmin and so your words are extra sharp and stinging. Your diplomacy has not been evident so far. However, all that you say is true. The Pandavas have been ill-treated by the Kauravas. They have undergone immense hardships because of their cousins. Their sufferings are innumerable. They have a right to the land of their forefathers. Your statements about Arjuna are also true. There is no one to equal him. We all know that".

As Bheeshma was talking, Radheya got up and said: "There is no end to this". He looked at Duryodhana and addressed the brahmin. He said: "It is stupid and very foolish to repeat the same thing again and again. This your Yudhishthira was defeated in a game of dice by Sakuni who played on behalf of Duryodhana. Yudhishthira went to the forest promising to obey certain conditions imposed on him. Now, regardless of the conditions he wants the kingdom back; he is depending on the support he is getting from the Matsyas and Drupada, his father-in-law. Listen to me, wise man. I know our king Duryodhana. You cannot frighten him. He will not part with a single foot of ground out of fear. If it is the right thing to do, he will give away the entire kingdom. All he wants is the observance of justice. The demand of the Pandavas is not just. They have not fulfilled the conditions. Let them wander in the forest for another twelve years according to the conditions. They can then come back and live as the subjects of Duryodhana, as his dependants. Ask Yudhishthira to be wise enough to give up this unjust demand for a kingdom which does not belong to him. If the Pandavas insist on a war, they will, later on, remember these my words".

Bheeshma did not like these words of Radheya. He became very angry. He said: "Radheya, I am sick of your words. Remember what you did when Arjuna fought with six great warriors all at once, very recently. I do not think you like to be reminded of your own behaviour at that time. In the Virata kingdom, you saw how he defeated all of us. Did you conquer him? By no means! You had to run away to save your life. If we do not do as the brahmin says, it is certain that we will all be killed in the battle. I know that Duryodhana and his team of evil mentors will be destroyed".

Dhritarashtra found words to speak. He pacified Bheeshma and he spoke to Radheya in harsh terms. He disapproved of his words and said: "Radheya, I am sure the great Bheeshma is speaking words which will be good for all of us: for the Kauravas as well as for the Pandavas. It is not right, Radheya, that you should speak like that to a well-wisher". Dhritarashtra turned to the messenger from Drupada. He said: "I request you to return to the Pandavas and tell them that I will be sending Sanjaya with my message. I will have to consult my court before I can arrive at a decision. Please tell my son Yudhishthira that Sanjaya will come to him soon".

The brahmin returned to Upaplavya. He told the Pandavas all about the talks in the court of Hastinapura. He gave a true account of the happenings. He described faithfully the army which had collected for the help of Duryodhana. He described its size and power. They all listened to his report. They were now waiting for the arrival of Sanjaya. He would bring them the message from the king.

Not many days had passed before he came. Sanjaya was received with great love and respect by Yudhishthira. Mutual greetings were exchanged. The conventional questions and answers were over. Yudhishthira said: "Sanjaya, I hope the elders of the court do not speak ill of us. I am still hoping that you are the bringer of pleasant news from Hastinapura. I do not know what you are going to say. I only hope Duryodhana and his friends remember us as we ought to be remembered. I am sure they have not forgotten Arjuna and his prowess. I hope they know that he is a powerful opponent in war. They must also remember Bheema and the excellent manner in which he wields the mace. They must know about the conquests of Bheema during the days of the Rajasuya. They must remember, of course, my brothers Nakula and Sahadeva. I hope Duryodhana remembers the fight he had with the gandharva by name Chitrasena, during our exile. Duryodhana cannot forget Dwaitavana in a hurry! He must remember how he owes his life to my good brothers who fought with the gandharva and rescued my cousins". Yudhishthira paused for a moment. Tears sprang to his eyes. He said: "One deed, one good deed, Sanjaya, is

not enough to achieve happiness. This is evident since I can see that all my attempts to win the love of Duryodhana are all fruitless".

Sanjaya began to speak. He said: "In the court of Dhritarashtra, all around Duryodhana there are good people and there are bad people. It will be sinful on the part of Dhritarashtra if he bears any ill-will towards you. You are so very righteous. He certainly does not approve of any injustice done to you. He grieves for it night and day. He has not forgotten either, the prowess of his nephews in the art of fighting. He remembers Bheema and his mace. He has had several proofs of the greatness of Arjuna. He has taken the trouble to make enquiries about your welfare during the twelve years of your exile.

"What the future holds for us cannot be gauged by anyone. Who would have thought that you, the monarch of the world, would have to spend thirteen years in exile? The king depends entirely on your intelligence to find a way out of the imminent predicament. He knows that the sons of Pandu will never stray from the path of Dharma, for the sake of their own pleasure. He therefore hopes that you, with your intelligence, will see to it that the sons of Dhritarashtra and Pandu do not fight with one another. The king has conferred with his court and sends you this message. Please listen carefully".

Yudhishthira asked all the heroes to assemble. Krishna was there, Satyaki, Virata, Drupada, Dhrishtadyumna and the four brothers of Yudhishthira. Sanjaya spoke the words of Dhritarashtra. "I send my best wishes to my sons Yudhishthira, Bheema, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. Also to my dear Krishna, Satyaki, Chekitana, Virata and Drupada. I am sure Dhrishtadyumna and Draupadi will also be present when these words are spoken. My dear Yudhishthira, I request you to be for peace. You are all full of all the good qualities. You are known for your love of steadiness, hatred of all crookedness and gentleness. You have been born in a great family. You will never do anything which will bring shame on the name of the family. A base deed should not be considered by you who is usually so high-minded. If, after all these years of righteousness, you now do a shameful deed, it will spoil your good name like a drop of eye-black will spoil a white cloth. I hope you will not willingly do a thing which will cause the destruction of the entire world. It is a sin. It will lead you to hell. You are set on destroying the world. Is it not a sin? Whether you win or lose is of minor importance.

"There is nothing like the sacrifice of one's life for the sake of the family. Indeed, only those will be blessed and their friends, and well-wishers too, who, instead of destroying their cousins, will, on the other hand, give up their lives for the sake of the family. If you insist on fighting with the Kauravas, you may be able to destroy them.

But what do you get? You will be unhappy all your life since the death of one's relations does not give happiness. Yours will be living death if you live after the death of your cousins. Your army is powerful. You have many great heroes to fight on your side. You have Krishna to help you. You may be victorious. Again, the Kaurava army is also powerful. It is invincible. Bheeshma, Drona, Kripa, Aswatthama, Radheya and a host of other heroes have made up the army of the Kauravas. The army of the son of Dhritarashtra is indeed, very powerful. You must think twice before you decide on war. Hence, Yudhishthira, I feel that there is nothing good that can come of victory or defeat. The sons of Kunti, who have been righteous all these years, must not taint their names and their reputation now by this act. I therefore fold my hands and stand in front of Krishna and Drupada and pray that this calamity may be averted. I have hopes that Krishna and Arjuna will not disregard these words of mine. I am talking for the welfare of the world. Krishna and Arjuna will die rather than think of disobeying me. I join my uncle Bheeshma in asking you to think of war no more. Please think in terms of confirmed peace between the sons of Pandu and Dhritarashtra".

Yudhishthira was amazed and distressed by the words of his uncle. He became quite angry. He said: "But this is unfair! My honoured uncle is trying to accuse me of deliberate cruelty. Of course I want peace. I did not ask for war. I have been quite against this war with my cousins. I sent word through my priest that *I am not for war*. I want peace. Who will wish for war when it is possible to avert it by compromise? Having lived in this world for so many years, do you think I have not garnered enough wisdom to realise the greatness of peace? Which cursed fool will want to fight if he can get what he wants without having to fight for it? The sons of Kunti have been known to follow the path of Dharma. This is a fact that is known to everyone.

"I have realised one thing. Fire, when it is fed, does not get quenched. It is never satisfied. Its appetite grows with what it feeds on. The mind of Dhritarashtra is like fire. The more he has, the more he wants. If it had not been for this, we would never have had to wander in the forest like mendicants! Still, we have been magnanimous enough not to remember all that. The king is himself in trouble. He seeks protection in the nobleness of others, being bereft of that quality himself. I think he is doing a foolish thing. He was guilty of certain things towards us. Let him now be prepared for retaliation. The king has all prosperity. Why does he weep and moan? He would encourage the sins and selfishness of his son and his crooked ways. He aided and abetted his meanness. He thought of only one thing: the

pleasure of his son. Duryodhana would not listen to the words of his uncle Vidura. Vidura is their best friend. But Duryodhana, and his father too, treated him as though he were their arch enemy. Dhritarashtra, intent only on pleasing his son, willingly allowed all that injustice in his court. He is so fond of his Duryodhana that he disregarded the words of Vidura, the wisest and the most far-sighted of the Kauravas. The king's only wish in this world is to satisfy his son. This son of his is steeped in sin. He is proud, arrogant and haughty. He does not know how to behave towards elders. His tongue is foul. His language does not befit a son of the most ancient family on the earth. He is vile. For such a son, this king of yours, this Dhritarashtra, knowingly and very willingly abandoned all Dharma.

"On that day when the game of dice was being played, Vidura spoke to the king and asked him to stop the game. But the king paid no heed to his words. All the words he spoke were these: 'WHO WON?' At every throw of the dice, the old man could speak only these words. He was as excited as his sons at the loss of my kingdom. Duryodhana, at least, is open and frank in his hatred for the Pandavas. We know where we stand with him. But this uncle of mine is different. He has the heart of his son but not his courage. Duryodhana at least says that he will not return the kingdom to me and that we will have to fight for it. But this king is more crooked than Sakuni. He tries to make out that I want war and that he is for peace. On the day when the game of dice was played I saw that the king paid no heed to the words of Vidura. I knew then that the destruction of the sons of the king was very near.

"Sanjaya, consider the court of the Kauravas. Think of the lawgivers there. The court is presided over by the sinful, selfish Duryodhana. Sakuni, Dussasana, and Radheya, the sutaputra, are the lawgivers. I cannot see how it can flourish when the kingdom is being ill-treated by these people. Dhritarashtra wants the entire earth. He wants his sovereignty to be undisputed. How can that be possible? When he has taken the kingdom by cheating, and when he clings to it like a child which clings to a toy which it has snatched from the hands of another, how can he possess it for long without the rightful owner asking for it? We are good people: we are righteous people. But remember, Yudhishthira is not a fool. Ask your king to think of everything that has happened to us these many years because of him and his sons. Tell your king that the thought of war is as hateful to me as it is to him, though the reasons for his hating the war are different from mine. Tell him that I am asking only for fairness. Tell him that my kingdom, my Indraprastha, must be returned to me. Let Duryodhana return it to me and there will be no war".

Sanjaya said: "You have not heard the message completely. I have some more words to be said. The king says: 'Consider the life of man on this earth. It is short. Why should you let it end in infamy? A life of shame is as good as a perished life. Perhaps, the Kauravas may not give up their kingdom. Unless there is a war, they will cling to your kingdom. Even then it will be better if you spend the rest of your life by begging for alms in the kingdom of the Vrishnis and the Andhakas. That will be better for you than getting sovereignty over the entire world. Life on this earth is very short. It is full of suffering and sin and unhappiness. Hence, it is very necessary to keep one's life untainted by sin. The instability of life is in contrast to the permanency of fame. Desire for the things of the earth makes a man lose all sense of fairness and makes him commit sins and prevents him from getting a good name. A man who wants immortality should kill all desire in his heart. The longing for wealth is a fetter. It is an obstacle in the path of a man's gaining immortality. Yudhishthira, you have spent many years in the company of men who have renounced the world. How is it, you have not learnt anything from them? Why do you still desire the things of this world? Give them up. This your desire for war is wrong. All these years of righteousness will go to waste if you persist in this sin. Concentrate on the acquisition of wealth for the next world and abandon those of this world. Even if you win this war and send the Kauravas to the abode of death what do you achieve? Repentance. I tell you once again. Life of man is very short. It is full of disease and it ends in death. You will become old and die soon. You may perform the great Rajasuya and the Aswamedha. All that glory will be eclipsed because of this action of yours. Desist from this.

" 'There is also this to be said. Thirteen years ago, when this so-called injustice was meted out to you, you should have fought with my sons. You had Krishna, Balarama, Drupada, Satyaki and so many others to help you. You did not fight. In fact, you would not fight even when they tried to make you fight. Now, after thirteen years, you are working yourself up into a fury. Having been patient so long, I am sure it will not be difficult for you to continue that patience to death. You lulled us into a false sense of security and made us think that you did not mind the treatment you got. After all these years why do you try to renew old wounds? A wise man will try to prevent others from fighting. But you seem to have taken leave of your senses. They say that wise people do not give way to wrath since wrath is the greatest poison which can cripple the mind. It has been said that the really wise man will control his wrath, swallow it as one would a medicine, and obtain peace. You may be able to kill Bheeshma,

Drona, Kripa, Salya, the brothers of Duryodhana and Duryodhana with his friend Radheya. What pleasure are you going to get by their death? Tell me that. This world bounded by the sea will be yours. I grant that. But, Yudhishthira, you will not be able to escape old age and death. I know you and your gentle mind. You will regret the killing of your cousins after they are dead. I ask you to give up your anger against me and my sons. I ask you to go back to the forest and spend the rest of your life there. Or live with your friend and cousin Krishna. You can live on alms collected in the kingdom of the Vrishnis. I ask you not to forsake the path of righteousness which you had been following so long and stray into the bypaths of sin.' "

CHAPTER 6

SANJAYA SENT BACK TO HASTINAPURA

Sanjaya sat silent after delivering the message of Dhritarashtra. There was silence for just a moment. The Pandavas were stunned by the impertinence of the old blind king. Bheema got up from his seat and began to stride up and down. He could not sit down—not after hearing this. Sahadeva looked like a thunder cloud. His breast was heaving rapidly. Arjuna looked at Krishna. He would have taken his Gandiva in his hand and marched to Hastinapura at that moment. The old man Drupada was sitting, the picture of consternation. Sanjaya looked at all of them and again at Yudhishthira as if to ask him for a reply. Yudhishthira was too distressed to speak. After all these years of devotion to his uncle, after all these years of suffering because he wanted to be righteous, after so many temptations which he had resisted because he wanted to do the right thing, he now heard these many accusations of Dhritarashtra piled up in front of him like snowflakes piling up to form an avalanche. He was shocked and hurt that he should have been made to look a sinner in front of all who were near and dear to him. With wet eyes he looked at Sanjaya and said: "I suppose the king did think that all these accusations are true. I cannot express any opinion at all. It is not for youngsters to find fault with their elders. It is a privilege granted to age. My uncle is taking full advantage of his privilege. You are, after all, a messenger. I must not show my anger against you. You have just conveyed the words of our uncle to me. As for my reply, I leave it to Krishna. He has heard the message. Whether I should fight after this message from

my uncle, or whether I should fight *because* of this message, should be decided by him. All my actions so far, have been sanctioned by him. I have never done anything which has not had his approval. His disapproval means so much to me. Now, he must decide my future for me. I abandon all Dharma and fall at his feet. He is my refuge. He will man the boat of life to the shores. I am not in the least worried about anything so long as Krishna is with me".

Krishna was touched by these words of Yudhishthira. He was as angry as thunder when he heard the words of Sanjaya. He now spoke words full of wisdom and sense. He said: "Sanjaya,. my first wish is the welfare of the Pandavas. If it can be possible, I would like the sons of Dhritarashtra to be long-lived. I do not at all understand the message of the king. Why does he attribute all the sins to his poor nephew, knowing full well where the blame has to be laid? You have followed the career of the Pandavas. You have seen everything. You know everything. You know how much patience Yudhishthira has exercised all these years. He did it because he was righteous. And out of the blue, comes this message from your king. Yudhishthira could have killed the Kaurava princes long ago. We asked him to. But he thought that it would not be right. And for that, the king blames him. Has the king lost his sense because of his extreme worry about his sons? You know about the Dharma of a kshatriya. A kshatriya should punish the breaker of law. Kshatriyas should punish thieves and those who covet the wealth of others. This is the duty of a kshatriya. And according to that, Yudhishthira should punish the sons of Dhritarashtra.

"This king of yours has no right to talk about Dharma to Yudhishthira, the image of Dharma. It is impertinence. It is an insult to our king. Your king is as much a thief as his sons, since he encouraged the robbery and enjoyed the fruits of the robbery all these years. Even now, we are not enamoured of the idea of fighting. We do not want to destroy the immense army of Duryodhana. We want peace. If our king Yudhishthira gets his kingdom back, all our preparations for war will be at once cancelled. You must go back to your king and tell him all that happened here. Tell the people in the court of the king that the insult they offered to Draupadi is reason enough to kill all of them without hesitation. Tell Radheya that the words he spoke to Draupadi, when she was standing in the Kaurava court, are not forgotten by Arjuna. They are keeping him awake at nights. Tell your younger prince, the arrogant Dussasana, that the Pandavas remember the words he spoke when they left Hastinapura dressed in tree bark and deer skin. He called Bheema 'cow'. Bheema remembers it. He is thirsty for the blood of that man. Tell Duryo-

dhana that, waking or sleeping, Bheema can see just one thing: the plump thigh of Duryodhana. He has not, even for a moment, forgotten it. Sanjaya, you know all that happened, and yet you bring us this message from your king. Nakula has not forgotten Uluka and neither has our Sahadeva forgotten the crafty Sakuni and his crooked smile when he told Yudhishthira, 'You still have Draupadi'. It is too well known to the world, or else I would begin at the beginning and recount the atrocities perpetrated by your king and his sons.

"Still, we are for peace. Your king is crying out for peace since he is afraid for his sons. We are crying out for peace, not because we are afraid for us, but because we are also afraid for the sons of Dhritarashtra. We do not want the whole world to die because of the obstinate pride of one man. We do not like to see so many people die because one man is too obdurate, and his father too avaricious. We want the world to live. We want the wives of all the kings to live happily. We do not want to see them in tears. That is why we want peace.

"Please go and tell your king that I will come to Hastinapura. I will try and see if I can convince that foolish Duryodhana that he should do the right thing by the Pandavas. I have my own doubts about the success of my mission. But I will try. I do not like the talk of your king. I want to show them the error of their ways. I will come and talk to all of them. If I am able to achieve it, I will feel proud that I have been able to save the world from death. I would have saved the earth from the noose of death which is even now tightening round her neck, thanks to the efforts of Duryodhana. Your king uses wrong words in talking to our king. Please tell him that if that foolish young man Duryodhana does not make up his mind to return the kingdom of Yudhishthira to Yudhishthira, Yudhishthira and his brothers will answer the words of your king with their arrows.

"There is a tree growing in Hastinapura. This tree is called Duryodhana. Its trunk is Radheya and its branches are Sakuni. Dussasana is its flowers and fruits. The root of this tree is a man called Dhritarashtra. Having looked at that evil tree, look on this other tree. This tree is called Yudhishthira. Its trunk is Arjuna. Bheema is its branches. Nakula and Sahadeva are its flowers and fruits. The root of this tree of goodness, Sanjaya, is myself. Consider this well. Think reasonably and decide which tree will live through the storm called the war and which will be thrown on the ground. You can now go back to the king and give our reply to his message of peace. The Pandavas are ready to lay down their arms. I will take up that responsibility. But only if Indraprastha is returned to Yudhishthira".

Sanjaya took leave of the Pandavas. He said: "Yudhishthira,

you must realise the embarrassing position in which I have been placed by my king. You and your brothers and your dear Krishna must look on me with affection. I am just the vehicle of the king's thoughts. I do not voice his sentiments nor do I approve of them. I wish you well. Please let me know what message I have to carry from you".

Yudhishthira said: "Sanjaya, you have ever been dear to us. Even when we were children you were as fond of us as our dear uncle Vidura. You were present during the game of dice. You know all about the indignities we had to suffer. I am not in the least angry with you. The golden bowl, which is made to hold poison, is still a golden bowl. It does not change its nature along with what it contains. You have been a good friend of the Pandavas. Please convey my best wishes to those at Hastinapura. Convey my greetings to every-one there. Tell them all individually that I wish them well. Then, tell Duryodhana what I am going to tell you now. 'Duryodhana, this your desire which is always making music in your heart, this desire to be master of the entire kingdom of the Kurus, is a vain desire. As for us, we do not want to do anything unpleasant. In fact, we want everything to be pleasant. You are a great king. Be really a great king. Give back to me my Indraprastha. Or fight with me. I wish to rule my kingdom again. I hope you will be sensible enough to listen to my words'."

Arjuna did not like this soft message. He said: "Ask your Duryodhana to release Indraprastha from her bondage. Yudhishthira is her lawful owner. If, however, he is foolish enough to refuse, our course is clear. He will have to face Arjuna, Bheema, Nakula and his powerful brother Sahadeva. We have on our side, Krishna, Satyaki, Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi and Yudhishthira whose patience has now reached its tether end. Let your king note this. For his making Yudhishthira sleep on the ground for twelve years, we will make him and his friends sleep on the battle-field. This our king, Yudhishthira, has controlled his anger for the last so many years. If he gives vent to it, Duryodhana will be burnt by its intensity. Let him take care of himself. Like fire burning a forest to ashes, Yudhishthira will destroy the entire host of the Kauravas with his wrath. Duryodhana wants war. Let him have it. He will see the mighty Bheema with his mace uplifted, walking on the field of battle. Your Duryodhana will see him kill all the sons of Dhritarashtra. There will be no difference between him and Yama, the other person who wields a mace.

"Let Duryodhana remember the sons of the Pandavas. Particularly Abhimanyu the son of Arjuna and the nephew of Krishna. He is a child, but not when he fights. Here we have Virata and Drupada who are invincible. Perhaps Duryodhana does not remember his old

associates, Sikhandi and Dhrishtadyumna. They remember him, though. Dhrishtadyumna will be our commander-in-chief; let your king take note of that. It is evident that Duryodhana does not remember the great Satyaki or else he would have thought twice before embarking on this voyage to the kingdom of Yama. Satyaki is the greatest of all our fighters. With him on our side, we are all able to sleep without any worry.

"Tell Duryodhana that I will be there. My chariot with its four white horses will be driven by Krishna. Think of that. Krishna will be my charioteer. Why should Duryodhana be so optimistic even after knowing this? Tell him that the Pandavas will be performing a great Yajna. The preceptor for this will be Krishna. The Vedas that will be chanted, will be the eternal music of the twang of my bow-string. The sacrifices will be the entire Kuru host, Sakuni, and last, but not the least, his dear friend, Radheya. You can carry my message back to Duryodhana".

Yudhishthira said: "My dear Sanjaya, you must try and convince the king that he should return my kingdom to me. Tell him about the injustice of the last so many years, ever since we were brought to Hastinapura, seventeen days after the death of our father. Please try, all of you, to avert the death of the Kauravas. I do not want to be the cause of this dire calamity. If all other things fail, tell Duryodhana that even if he gives me just five cities, or rather, villages, I will be happy." Yudhishthira ignored the outraged eyes of his brothers and continued: "Sanjaya, tell him that I want Indraprastha, Vrikaprastha, Jayanta, and Varanavata. These four I must have. The fifth, I leave to Duryodhana. He can give me any other city. Try and see if you can avert the dreadful war at least by this. I do not want to see them dead. I want to live in peace with my cousins".

Sanjaya took leave of all of them. He was taken to the army camp and he saw the army of the Pandavas. He then returned to Hastinapura.

CHAPTER 7

VIDURA-NEETI

Sanjaya went immediately to the palace of Dhritarashtra and announced himself. The king welcomed him eagerly. Sanjaya said: "Yudhishthira prostrates himself before you and enquires after your

welfare and that of your sons and friends. His brothers and Krishna are quite well. I was so happy in the fine atmosphere of peace and righteousness I found there. It was like the clean sweet breath of the mountains. I do not like your behaviour or your words. I had a most unpleasant piece of work to do because of you. You are unrighteous. Your sons are sinners. You are hoping to enjoy this earth in spite of this. I am surprised at your optimism. I gave your message to Yudhishthira. His reply is to be given to you in the court tomorrow. I want to go and rest. I am tired physically and mentally. Please grant me leave to go".

Sanjaya went away. The mind of Dhritarashtra was terribly upset by the words he had spoken. He was not told about the reply of Yudhishthira. The king's frame burned as if with fever. He tried to sleep. He could not. In despair he sent for Vidura. Vidura came to him quickly and asked him why he had been sent for. The condition of the king was indeed pitiable. He said: "Vidura, Sanjaya has returned from Upaplavya. He spoke harsh words to me and went away. He would not give me even a hint of Yudhishthira's reply. I have tried to sleep. I cannot sleep. You are my only friend. You have loved me with all my faults. You must console me and make me sleep. I cannot sleep".

Vidura said: "My lord, five kinds of people are unable to sleep. A man who lusts after the wife of another cannot sleep. A thief cannot sleep. A man who has lost all his wealth cannot sleep, or one who thinks all his wealth will be lost. An unsuccessful man cannot sleep. A weak man oppressed by a strong man cannot sleep. I hope none of these descriptions fits you. Surely, avarice and greed are not qualities to be found in you!"

Dhritarashtra was not unused to sarcasm in the words of Vidura. He smarted under the insight of his brother. He said: "Please tell me how I can sleep".

Vidura smiled at him with pity blended with scorn. He said: "You have not been able to sleep for the last so many years, my lord! From the moment the Pandavas, led by the rishis of Satasringa, came to Hastinapura, you have not been able to sleep. Why, your sleeplessness goes further back. I remember the day when your son Duryodhana was born. You called me to your presence and asked me: 'I hear that a son has already been born to my brother Pandu. He is older than this my son. Do you think there will be trouble about the heir to the throne because of this?' Since that day, jealousy has lodged in your heart and has driven out sleep.

"For the last so many years, I have been trying in vain to instal into you some righteousness. You are a very sinful person. You have

been responsible for the sufferings of the Pandavas and the imminent destruction of the Kauravas. How can a sinful person like you get sleep? Yudhishthira has always paid you the respect due to a father. He considers you as his father. But you have always been behaving like a thief towards him. I am not surprised at this suffering of yours. You ask me to tell you how you can sleep. At this very moment, if you decide to return Yudhishthira's kingdom to him, you can sleep like an innocent child. Please listen to me. You are not wise. You are foolish."

Dhritarashtra said: "Tell me, my dear brother, what are the qualities one finds in a wise man and in a foolish man".

Vidura said: "I will tell you what a wise man should be like. A man should aspire for the higher things, ideals, in life. The assets of such a man are self-knowledge, exertion, forbearance and steadiness in virtue. Such a man is wise. Neither anger, nor joy, nor pride, nor false modesty, nor vanity, can distract him from his purpose. His actions are always done with the thought that they should serve both the worlds. Desire does not tinge his actions. Honest deeds delight him and he loves what is good. He is unaffected either by honours or by slights. Like a lake in the course of the river Ganga, he is calm. cool and unagitated.

"On the other hand, the qualities of a fool are also easy to enumerate. Scripture is a closed book as far as he is concerned. He is vain: he is proud and, when he wants to have something, he will never hesitate to employ unfair means. He has a knack of desiring what he has no right to desire. Those who are powerful make him envious. Let me tell you about a peculiar attribute of sin. One man commits a sin and several reap the fruits resulting from his sin. But in the end, the sin attaches itself ONLY to the one man, while those many who enjoyed the fruits of his sin escape unscathed!

"A wise king should discriminate the TWO with the help of the ONE. He must control the THREE by means of the FOUR. He has to conquer the FIVE, know the SIX, abstain from the SEVEN and be happy. By ONE is meant the intellect: by TWO, right and wrong: by THREE friend, stranger and enemy: by FOUR is meant gift, conciliation, disunion and severity: by FIVE the senses: by SIX, treaty, war, etc.: by SEVEN, women, dice, hunting, harshness of speech, drinking, severity of punishment, and waste of wealth. This means that one should know how to discriminate between right and wrong by the use of the intellect. Friend, foe or stranger can be won over by one of the four: gift, etc. The senses must be under control and a king should be familiar with treaty, etc. which are essential. The seven have naturally to be avoided if a king aspires to be wise.

"Poison kills but one man: so does a weapon. But wicked counsels destroy an entire kingdom with kings and subjects. The highest good is righteousness. The one supreme peace is forgiveness. Supreme contentment is knowledge. Supreme happiness is benevolence. A king can easily become great by doing just two things: refraining from harsh speech and disregarding those that are wicked. Three crimes are considered to be terrible: theft of another's property, outrage of another man's wives and breach with friends. Three things destroy the soul: lust, anger and covetousness. Three are essential: a follower, one who seeks protection and one who has come to your abode. These should be protected. A king, although powerful, should never confer with these four: men of small sense, men that procrastinate, men who are indolent and men who flatter. Five things have to be worshipped: father, mother, fire, the preceptor and the soul. Six faults should be avoided by a king who wishes to be great: sleep, drowsiness, fear, anger, indolence and procrastination. These six should not be forsaken: truth, charity, diligence, benevolence, forgiveness and patience. A king should renounce the seven faults. Eight things glorify a king: wisdom, high birth, self-restraint, learning, prowess, moderation in speech, gifts given with discrimination, and gratitude. This human body is a house with nine doors, three pillars, and five witnesses. It is presided over by the soul. The king who knows this is wise. These ten do not know what virtue is: the intoxicated, the inattentive, the raving, the fatigued, the angry, the starving, the dejected, the covetous, the frightened and the lustful.

"A man who does not grieve when a calamity overtakes him, who does his best all the while with his senses under perfect control, who bears misery with patience, is the foremost of men. One who bears no malice towards others but is kind to all, who does not talk arrogantly, who forgives a quarrel, is praised everywhere.

"A king who seeks prosperity should take only that which can be taken and which will be beneficial. As the bee collects the honey without destroying the flower, so should a king take taxes from the people without injuring them. One should pluck flowers but one should not uproot the plants.

"A wise man should learn good behaviour, good words and good acts from every side, as a gleaner collects grains of corn from the field abandoned by the reapers. Virtue is preserved by truthfulness: learning by application: beauty by cleansing the body: high lineage by good character. Mere lineage, in the case of one whose behaviour is not good, cannot command respect. A king or a man who envies another's wealth, beauty, might, high lineage, happiness, good fortune and honours, suffers from an incurable disease. Good behaviour is essential to man.

Intoxication of wealth is much more to be censured than wine: for a man intoxicated with prosperity can never be brought to his senses unless and until he meets with a fall.

"Like the moon during the lighted fortnight, calamities increase for him who is a slave to his senses. The king who wishes to control his counsellors before controlling his own self, or the king who wishes to subdue his adversaries before controlling his counsellors, fights a losing battle, losing his strength. A king should first subdue his own self, regarding it as his foe. He will then never fail to subdue his counsellors and later his enemies. Great prosperity waits upon him who has subjugated his senses, or controlled his soul, or who is capable of punishing all offenders, or who acts with discernment, or who is blessed with patience.

"One's body is the chariot: the soul within is the driver: and the senses are its steeds. Drawn by those excellent steeds when they are well trained, the wise man pleasantly goes through the journey of life in peace. The horses, however, if unbroken and incapable of being controlled, lead the unskilled driver to destruction in the course of the journey. Many evil-minded kings, because of their want of mastery over the senses are ruined by acts of their own, lust for kingdom being the cause of their sin.

"To control speech is said to be the most difficult. It is not easy to hold a long conversation, utter words filled with meaning and delightful to the hearers. Well-spoken speech is capable of doing so much good. Similarly, ill-spoken words cause evil. A forest pierced by arrows or cut down by hatchets may grow again, but the heart wounded by ill-spoken words can never recover. Weapons such as arrows or darts can easily be extracted from the body but a word dagger plunged deep into the heart is incapable of being taken out. Word arrows shot from the mouth are terrible. Smitten by them, man grieves day and night. A learned man should not shoot such arrows, for do they not touch the very vitals of the others?

"The person, to whom the gods ordain defeat, has his senses taken away from him and it is because of this that he stoops to ignoble deeds. When the intellect becomes dim and destruction is near, wrong, looking like right, strikes the heart firmly. The clouded intellect causes defeat.

"Ablution in all the holy spots and kindness to all creatures: these two are equal. Perhaps kindness to creatures surpasses the former. As long as man's good deeds are spoken of in this world, so long is he glorified in heaven.

"The gods do not protect men taking up clubs in their hands after the fashion of herdsmen. Unto them they wish to protect, they grant

intelligence. There is no doubt that one's desires meet with success in proportion to the attention he pays to righteousness and morality. The Vedas never rescue a deceitful man from sin. Gold is tested by fire: a well-born person by his deportment: an honest man by his conduct: and a brave man is tested during a season of panic: he who is self-controlled, in times of poverty: and friends and foes are tested in times of calamity and danger. Sacrifice, study, asceticism, gift, truth, forgiveness, mercy and contentment constitute the eight different paths of righteousness. The first four of these may be practised from motives of pride but the later four can exist only in them that are truly great.

"Do that during the day which may enable you to pass the night in happiness: do that during the eight months of the year which may enable you to pass the rainy seasons happily. Do that during youth which may ensure a happy old age: do that during your whole life here which will enable you to live happily hereafter.

"Untying all the knots of the heart by the aid of tranquillity, mastering all the passions, observing true religion, one should learn to regard both the agreeable and the disagreeable like his own self. One should not return the slanders or reproaches of others. Strange to say, when a silent man suffers these reproaches, it is the slanderer that is consumed and the virtues, if any, of the slanderer find a home in the other man.

"Never quarrel with friends. Avoid the company of those that are vile and low. Never be arrogant and ignoble in conduct. Avoid speaking words that are fraught with anger. Harsh words burn and scorch the very vitals, bones and heart of men. And so, he that is virtuous should avoid harsh and angry words. Silence, it is said, is better than speech. If speak you must, it is better to speak the truth. If truth is to be spoken, it is better to say what is agreeable. If what is agreeable is to be spoken it is better to say what is consistent with morality.

"Asceticism, self-restraint, knowledge, sacrifices, pure marriages and gifts of food—these are the hall-marks of a high family.

"Men die and are reborn again and again. Repeatedly they wither and grow. Oftentimes they ask and are being asked. Again and again, they lament and are being lamented. Happiness and misery, plenty and dearth, gain and loss, life and death, are all shared by all in due order. A self-controlled man should neither be elated nor should he grieve.

"Anger is a kind of bitter, acrid and hot drink: and it is painful in its consequences. It is a kind of headache born not of any physical illness. The wise can swallow it and never those who are wanting in wisdom. Excess of pride, excess in speech, excess in eating, anger,

the desire for enjoyments and intestinal disorders—these are six sharp swords which cut off the period of life allotted to creatures. It is these which kill and not death.

"Kings are said to have five different kinds of strength. Of these the strength of arms is considered to be the most inferior kind. The acquisition of good counsellors is regarded as the second kind of strength. The acquisition of wealth is the third kind of strength. The strength of birth which one naturally acquires from one's sires and grandsires is the fourth kind of strength. That, however, by which all these are won, and which is the foremost of all kinds of strength, is called the strength of the intellect.

"One who never gives way to anger, one who regards pieces of mud, stone and gold as all of the same value and he that stands aloof from what is agreeable and disagreeable, like one perfectly withdrawn from the world, is a real yogi. Intelligence, tranquillity of mind, self-control, purity, absence of harsh speech, and an unwillingness to do anything displeasing to friends—these seven are regarded as the fuel to the flame of prosperity. Virtue is everlasting: pleasure and pain are transitory. Life is, indeed, everlasting, but its particular phases are transitory. Forsaking those which are passing, betake thyself to that which is everlasting and let contentment be thine: since contentment is the greatest of all acquisitions.

"Illustrious and mighty kings have ruled this mighty earth so full of wealth and glory and joy. All of them have become victims of the Universal Destroyer. They went away leaving behind them their kingdoms and their immense pleasures. The son, brought up with anxious care, when dead, is taken up and carried away by men to the burning grounds. With dishevelled hair and with piteous cries they cast the body into the funeral pyre as though it were a piece of wood. Others enjoy the wealth of a dead man while birds and fire feast on the elements of his body. Only two things go with him to the other world: his merits and his sins. Throwing away the body, relatives, friends, and sons retrace their steps like birds abandoning the tree without flowers or fruits. The man cast into the funeral pyre is followed only by his own actions. Therefore should men, carefully and gradually, earn the merit of righteousness.

"The soul is spoken of as a river and life is also spoken of as a river. In the river of life the waters are the five senses. Its crocodiles and sharks are desire and anger. Making self-control the boat, one should cross the eddies which are represented by repeated births. In the river which is the soul, religious merit makes up its sacred bath: truth, its waters: self-control, its banks: kindness, its waves. He that is righteous purifies himself by a bath in this river, for the soul is

sacred and the absence of desire is the supreme merit".

Dhritarashtra said: "Vidura, tell me more about the soul. Tell me how, with this body of mine, I can meet with that Ancient and Eternal One. Tell me what death is". Vidura said: "My lord! I am born in the Sudra order and, therefore, do not venture to say more than what I have said already. That ancient and eternal rishi Sanatsujata will talk to you on those subjects. I will call him to you".

Vidura meditated on the great rishi. Realising that he was called in mind by Vidura, the great rishi came there. Vidura said: "There is a doubt in the king's mind which can be cleared only by your revered self. Please speak to him". Dhritarashtra asked the rishi his doubts concerning death and the quest of the Brahman. Sanatsujata said: "I will give you my opinion. The learned are of opinion that death results from ignorance. Ignorance is death and so, knowledge, the absence of ignorance, is immortality. Death does not devour creatures like a tiger: its shape itself is undiscernible. Besides this form of death, some imagine Yama to be death. This, however, is due to the weakness of the mind. The pursuit of Brahman or self-knowledge is immortality. The imaginary god Yama holds his sway in the region of the Pitris. It is at his command that death, in the form of wrath, ignorance and covetousness, arises among men. Swayed by pride, men walk in paths that are unrighteous. None among them succeeds in attaining to his real nature. Their understanding clouded, and themselves swayed by passions, they cast off their bodies and repeatedly fall into hell. They are always followed by their senses. It is thus that ignorance receives the name 'death.'

"These men that desire the fruits of their work, proceed to heaven when the time comes, casting off their bodies. Hence they cannot avoid death. Because, when the merits of work are exhausted, they fall and rebirth is inevitable. Embodied creatures, from inability to attain the knowledge of Brahman and from their connection with earthly enjoyments, are obliged to go through a round of rebirths, up and down and around.

"The natural inclination of man towards pursuits that are unreal, is alone the cause of the senses being misled. The soul that is constantly affected by the pursuit of objects that are unreal, worships only earthly enjoyments that surround it. The desire for enjoyment first strikes a man. Lust and wrath soon follow behind. These three lead foolish men to death. They, however, that have conquered their souls, succeed by self-restraint to escape death. Ignorance, assuming the shape of Yama, cannot devour the man who kills desire by self-restraint. What can death do to a person whose soul has not been confounded or misled by desire? For him death has no terrors. Therefore, if the existence

of desire, which is ignorance, is to be destroyed, no wish, not even the slightest one, is either to be entertained or pursued.

"The soul which is in the body, when it is associated with wrath and covetousness, when filled with ignorance, is said to meet with death. Knowing that desires arise on the way, if a man relies on knowledge, he need entertain no fear of death. Even as the body is destroyed when brought under the influence of death, death itself is destroyed when it comes under the influence of knowledge."

Dhrita: "What is the object of asceticism? Mauna? There are, I have heard, two kinds of mauna: restraint of speech and meditation. Which is superior? Can a person of learning attain to a state of quietude and achieve emancipation, by mauna? How is it to be practised here?"

Sanat: "The object of asceticism or mauna is to attain to that which is beyond the reach of language or the mind. True mauna consists, not in merely restraining speech but the absolute restraint of all the senses and the mind. The aspect, or form or nature of mauna must necessarily be the loss of all consciousness of both the objective and the subjective: and the concentration of all consciousness on Brahman alone. When such a state is reached Brahman is reached. Brahman is the Vedic symbol AUM representing the GROSS, the SUBTLE and the CAUSAL. Mauna is obtained by the gradual merging of the gross in the subtle, the subtle in the causal and the causal into Brahman.

"There are six kinds of renunciation and they are all commendable. The first is: never experiencing joy on occasions of prosperity. The second is: abandoning of sacrifices, prayers and pious acts with a desire for the merits arising from them. The third is: abandoning desire, or withdrawing from the world. The fourth is: one should not grieve or allow one's self to be afflicted by grief when one's actions fail: or, when anything disagreeable happens, one should feel no pain. The fifth kind consists in not soliciting even one's sons, wives and others that may all be very dear. The sixth is giving away to a deserving person.

"Brahman is not to be attained soon. After the senses have been restrained and after the will has been merged in the pure intellect, the state that succeeds is one of utter absence of worldly thought. The knowledge leading to the attainment of Brahman is attainable only by the practice of Brahmacharya.

"By Brahmacharya is meant the search for truth. Though residing in the mind, and though inherent in the mind, the knowledge of Brahman is still unmanifest. It is by the aid of pure intellect and Brahmacharya that it is made manifest. Those who desire to attain Brahman state subdue all desires and, endued with righteousness, succeed in dis-

sociating the soul from the body like a blade projecting from a clod of earth. Such a man is purified in body, is truly wise. For, by Brahmacharya he becomes like a child, free from all passions, and triumphs over death at last. Men obtain by work only worlds that are perishable. However, he that is blessed with knowledge attains the state of Brahman which is everlasting."

Dhrita: "You say, my lord, that a wise man perceives the existence of Brahman in his own soul. Tell me what the true form and colour of the Omnipresent and eternal Brahman is."

Sanat: "Neither on earth, nor in the sky, nor in the waters of the ocean, is there anything like it. Neither in the stars, nor in lightning, nor in the clouds, is its form to be seen. Nor is it visible in the atmosphere, nor in the devas, nor in the moon nor in the sun. Neither in the Rik, nor among the Yajus, nor among the Atharvans nor in the pure Sama is it to be found. Incapable of being compassed, and lying beyond the reach of the limited intellect, even the Universal Destroyer, after the Dissolution, is destroyed in it. Incapable of being gazed at, it is subtle as the edge of a razor; and it is grosser than the mountains. It is the basis upon which everything is founded. It is unchangeable. It is this visible universe. It is vast. It is delightful. Creatures have all sprung from it and are returned to it. Free from all kinds of duality, it is manifest as the universe. It is all-pervading. Men of learning say that it is without any change except in the language used to describe it. Those who are acquainted with THAT in which this universe is established, are blessed indeed."

Chapter 8

SANJAYA IN THE KAURAVA COURT

Led by Bheeshma and Dhritarashtra, the Kauravas entered the great assembly hall one by one. Then came Sanjaya. He greeted them all. He conveyed to them all individually the respectful greetings of Yudhishthira. Dhritarashtra asked him to tell them about the happenings at Upaplavya. Sanjaya gave them a detailed and vivid account of everything. He gave them the messages of Krishna, Yudhishthira and Arjuna. He did not omit a single word nor did he spare them a single detail of the varied expressions on the faces of the men there who had been listening to the message of Dhritarashtra. No one spoke during this recital. It was over.

Bheeshma spoke to Duryodhana: "My dear child, you are trying to drown yourself. You have not realised the power of this combination: Krishna and Arjuna. It is said by the knowing ones that they are Nara and Narayana. Do not persist in your mad determination to fight the Pandavas. They are invincible. On the one hand they have Dharma on their side, and on the other they have Krishna. Everyone will listen to your words. Tell them that you are not for war. Please do it. You are depending on the wrong persons to steer you through this war. You have the evil-minded Sakuni: you have the sinful and impertinent Dussasana: you have this low-born Radheya who has been handicapped by the curse of Bhargava. He has another curse to weaken his prowess. That is the curse of the brahmin. He has also given up his Kavacha and his Kundalas too. How can you hope to win?"

Radheya was terribly hurt by these words of Bheeshma. He said: "Duryodhana, this grandfather of yours is bent on hurting me whenever he can. It is not right. I have never been false to the duties of a kshatriya. I may not be a kshatriya but my actions are those of one. My birth is not of such importance as my loyalty to my friend. I have never injured the son of Dhritarashtra. I have always considered that he is my lord and master. To please him, I will do anything. I will slay the Pandavas single-handed. I know that I can".

Bheeshma sneered at him. He would not even talk to Radheya. He looked not at Radheya but at Duryodhana and said: "For the last so many years this man has been talking only about how he is going to kill the Pandavas. So far, we have never had a chance to see this bravery of his. He is not even one sixteenth as good as Arjuna. Depending on this man you have dared to insult the great Pandavas. You have committed a grievous fault. You should not have so much faith in the valour of this man who is not so good as he thinks. You saw how he behaved during the fight with the gandharva in Dwaitavana. You saw how he fought when we all raided Virata. Radheya has failed you miserably. Yet, you will not hear a word against him. I am sorry for you".

Duryodhana did not bother to reply. He hated these words of his grandfather. He loved Radheya as Krishna loved Arjuna. It was friendship which could not be understood by anyone. It had about it something divine. Duryodhana always resented his grandfather and his words since they were usually more than vehement against his friend. These scenes were frequent in his court. His friend was very unpopular with all the elders of the court. His father was the one exception. He loved Radheya. But that was because Radheya loved Duryodhana. No one loved Radheya except Duryodhana. So, every-

time someone insulted him Duryodhana's affection for Radheya grew. He now turned his face away from his grandfather. Bheeshma stopped talking and sat down. Duryodhana had the knack of insulting people by a look, by the raising of an eyebrow, by the sneering twist of the corner of his lip. He used this weapon very often. It would silence the old dotards as nothing else could.

Drona spoke: "What the noble Bheeshma said is right. It is not wise to be so foolhardy. The words of Arjuna and Krishna are not just words. They speak the truth when they say that they will destroy the Kauravas. We must make peace with them. Arjuna learnt archery from me. I know his prowess. He now knows more than I do. He has obtained weapons from all the gods. He has now got the Pasupata from Lord Sankara. Of all the military tactics the most foolish thing is to underrate the opponent. This is just what is being done. Please take heed".

The king now asked Sanjaya to continue his recital. Sanjaya told them about the words of Yudhishthira: his parting words. He then described the army which had been collected. He told them about its strength and power. As he was talking, he saw, once again, in his mind's eye, the army. He was suddenly overcome with fainting. Sanjaya fell down senseless. There was a lot of concern at the fainting of Sanjaya. It showed, more clearly than words, the terrible aspect of the army of the Pandavas. He was revived. With wild and frightened looks the poor charioteer of the king continued his recital. He spoke about the strength of the Pandavas and their allies. Dhritarashtra listened to it with a sinking heart. He was terrified. He said: "When I listen to you, my heart trembles with fear for the lives of my sons. I am so scared of Bheema and his oath. I have not been able to sleep for the last so many nights. I know for certain that Bheema will kill all my sons. I know that my son, my Duryodhana, will die with his thigh broken. I know that Dussasana will lie bleeding on the battle-field. I can imagine Bheema ploughing through our ranks with his mace uplifted. He will look like the river Ganga in flood, in the rainy season, overflowing her banks and uprooting all the trees on her banks. I can see everything that is to happen. I am afraid. I am not so afraid of the brothers of Yudhishthira as of Yudhishthira himself and his angry looks which he will bend on my sinful sons. This my son will not listen to reason though everyone is advising him. He will not listen to the words of Vidura, who is reputed to be the wisest of men".

These words of the king enraged Sanjaya. He said: "Your words against your son, my lord, are not correct. You are the real sinner and not Duryodhana. The wise and gentle Vidura has been speaking to you for the last so many years. But you have not listened to his

words of advice: not even once. I was there when the game of dice was being played. Vidura then spoke to you and not to your son. He asked you to stop the game. A father, my lord, is the best friend a man can have. Your son, the unfortunate Duryodhana, has been denied that privilege. A father, who betrays the interests of his son in his eagerness to please himself and his own desires, is not a father. When the game was going on, Vidura was appealing to your goodness. But that fell on deaf ears. Your ears were then keyed to receive only one sound: the rattle of the dice on the floor. You were able to speak only one sentence: 'Who won?' You could hear only one set of sentences: the account of the losses of Yudhishthira. You were sitting in the great hall, smiling to yourself all the while. You have always been ill-willed as far as the children of your brother are concerned. Even when they went to the forest, you were not sorry. You remember you sent for me then, my lord? You began to be worried: not because the Pandavas were made to suffer, but because they had sworn to kill your sons. Your sons are going to be killed. There is no doubt about it. But that is not because of their sins. They will be killed because of *your* sins. You have no right to blame that child, Duryodhana, for your foolishness. He has friends who love him. He has eleven Akshauhinis to help him. He has won the affection of so many kings by his good nature. They are prepared to die for him. As for you, you have not a single friend. No one loves you. You have brought ruin on the House of the Kurus. God has given you this dreadful affliction: blindness. But you have brought on yourself a greater affliction: an inner blindness. You are not able to see anything as it ought to be seen.

"Your sons are fortunate. They will all die on the battle-field. Their sins will be redeemed. They will reach the heavens meant for those who die on the field of battle. Their deaths will be so great that their sins will not be remembered by the world. The world will forget the meanness and selfishness of Duryodhana because of the noble death he will meet with when he is killed by Bheema. Bravery is always appreciated. This Radheya is a great man. He has always been righteous. He is the greatest of all givers. There is no one like him. He is now ready to give up his life for Duryodhana. He will be remembered by men in aftertimes as the noblest of the men who died on the battle-field. But you, my lord, you will be denied the death which will be a merciful release. You will live to see the death of your beloved son Duryodhana and all his brothers. I am very sorry for you. In the annals of time your name will be the most hated. You will not escape censure from posterity. You have done everything to deserve it. You have brought ruin upon yourself. There is no hope for you".

CHAPTER 9

"GIVE US FIVE VILLAGES"

Duryodhana felt sorry for his father. He intervened and said: "My dear father, do not be frightened. I know full well that the army of the Pandavas is quite large and powerful. I have heard every detail from our spies. Thirteen years back, when the Pandavas had reached the forest called Kamyaka, Krishna went to them with a great army. Satyaki was with him. Dhrishtaketu, Dhrishtadyumna and Drupada went with him. They were all for killing us. They had assembled very near Indraprastha. They said that they were ready to fight us. At that time, we were not popular. All the kings of Bharatavarsha sided with Yudhishthira. They saw Yudhishthira dressed in tree barks and deer skin. It was so soon after the Rajasuya. The kings were horrified at the fate of the monarch. It was known to us that we were very unpopular at that time. All the kings hated us. They were ready to fight for our dear cousins. I was really afraid that there would be a war. I thought that Yudhishthira would wage war on us at once. If he did, I felt that we would be defeated. The world was with him. I did not have a single friend except Radheya. I went to the elders of the court. I asked them what we should do if the war did come to be fought. Then Bheeshma, Drona and Kripa pacified me. Drona said: 'Do not be afraid. They will not be able to defeat us. We can, one of us even, withstand the onslaught of all of them. We can fight with them with our arrows and bows which are famed the world over. Bheeshma fought with a host of princes when he brought wives for your grandfather, Vichitraveerya. When this great Bheeshma is on your side, why should you be afraid?'

"My dear father, when all the kings of the world were on their side, even then, Drona said that we could defeat the Pandavas. But now, the circumstances have been altered. They are not so powerful. I now have more friends than they have. My supporters are many. The Pandavas are without many friends now. Their warriors are bound to them by family ties and not by bonds of affection. My army is definitely stronger and more powerful. As for your fears about Bheema, they are unfounded too. I am the better fighter. During all these years I have been steadily practising. When we were all students under Balarama he said: 'Duryodhana is my equal. He is the greatest of fighters with the mace. He is far superior to all the others'. I am definitely superior to Bheema. He knows it, Krishna knows it and

Arjuna knows it. Actually, I am rather looking forward to this fight with Bheema. It will be thrilling to hit him with my mace and split his head into two. I can do it easily. I have never loved Bheema. His fighting too, is very crude. He has not got the skill. His strokes have not the swing and polish which mine have. Balarama has said so. I will defeat Bheema easily. I can kill him. Once Bheema is killed, the spine of the Pandava army will be broken and it will fall to the ground. They will have nothing left to live for. Even *I* can kill that vain and conceited Arjuna.

"Look at my army, father. I have the great Bheeshma. He has been granted the boon that he can die only when he wants to die. He is divine. He is no mortal like the others. Look on Drona. He has been born not like ordinary man. He is the son of Bharadwaja. Aswatthama has been born by the grace of Sankara. He cannot die. Neither can Kripa die. With these immortals on our side, why should we worry? Each one of them can, individually, defy the gods of the heavens. Arjuna cannot fight any of them. I have Radheya. He has been declared to be Parasurama's equal, by the Bhargava himself. There may be people here who may want to disagree with me. But I maintain that he is the equal of Bheeshma, Drona and Kripa. Grandfather says that he is not powerful since he has given away his Kavacha and Kundalas. Not at all. Indra begged of him his earrings which were so beautiful. In return for them Radheya has got Indra's Sakti which can kill the most terrible enemy. Why should I be worried when I have so much help? My grandfather is enough to kill all of them. Our victory is as clear as the palm of my hand.

"Let me put some courage into your fainting heart by telling you the names of the heroes who will be fighting for me. Bheeshma, Drona, Aswatthama, Kripa, Radheya, Bahlika, Brihadratha, Bhagadatta, Salya, Sala, Vinda, Anuvinda, Jayadratha, my brothers led by Dussasana, and Sakuni. I have eleven Akshauhinis as against their seven. I have absolutely no worry about the future".

Duryodhana spoke with great confidence. He had thought out everything and everyone admired his clear thinking and his clear talking. Duryodhana continued: "What can this Virata do, when we have the Trigartas? Susarma can defeat him again and again. The enmity of the Trigartas against Arjuna is so great that they have taken an oath to kill him or be killed by him. They are the Samsaptakas. I have considered the strength of our army and of theirs. I feel that we are better in every way. You can rest in peace, father. I will win".

The king turned towards Sanjaya. He said: "One more question, Sanjaya. How do they feel about the war? Do they sound as hopeful as my son? Are they planning out things as we are doing?"

Sanjaya laughed slightly. He said: "Planning? Of course they are planning for the war. They are quite prepared for a war. They are not looking forward to it as your son is. No. They want to avert it if they can. I was asked by Yudhishthira to try my level best and prevent the war from being fought. Do you know what he said? He said: 'Sanjaya, tell Duryodhana this, if all other things fail. "We have borne so many things because of you. You insulted our dear queen Draupadi. That is the reason, more than anything else, which has angered us. Still, we do not want war. I want my kingdom back. If you refuse to give it back, then, even then, in my desire for the general good, I am prepared to give up my claim. Give me five cities. I want Indraprastha, Vrikaprastha, Jayanta and Varanavata. The fifth, I leave to your wish. I want wealth since I have always wanted to give away money to brahmins. I want just these five cities, or rather, five villages. I do not want to see the death of my dear relatives. Why should we destroy each other? Let brothers live. Let no fathers and sons be parted from one another. Let the Pandavas and the Kauravas live together in happiness. For the sake of the general good, I am prepared to forego my kingdom. But I must have the assurance that you will give me these five cities. I want peace. I do not want to be the cause of the death of eighteen Akshauhinis and all the heroes of our land".' Duryodhana, Yudhishthira is a good man. He told me: 'We have no secrets from anyone. You are at liberty to examine our army. Ask them any questions you want to. I have no objection. Please go back and tell Bheeshma and Dhritarashtra to advise their Duryodhana against war'. I went through the ranks. I mentioned to them who I was and asked them about the plans of the Pandavas. They told me everything. They have a feeling that most probably Dhrishtadyumna will be the commander of the army. It has to be decided in the council.

"As for the opponents each has chosen, Bheeshma has become the share of the great Sikhandi in the war. The eldest of the Pandavas has decided to kill Salya. Duryodhana and his brothers have become the due of Bheema. Arjuna has taken as his share, Radheya, Aswatthama, Jayadratha and other kings who may come to their help. The powerful Kekaya brothers have taken it upon themselves to kill their cousins who have joined Duryodhana. The Malavas and the Salvas have decided to fight the Trigartas. They may not be able to kill them. But they have decided to harass them as much as they can. The king Brihadbala of Kosala, the sons of Duryodhana and our Dussasana are chosen by Abhimanyu as his victims. The sons of the Pandavas are to support Dhrishtadyumna in his fight against Drona. He is going to kill the great Acharya. Chekitana has hopes of meeting Somadatta in a single fight. Satyaki has his eyes on Kritavarma. He has not forgiven him

for joining the Kauravas. Sahadeva, of course, has set his mind on killing Sakuni. Nakula has Uluka, the son of Sakuni, as his share. This is the general outline of their plans. There will be many alterations when the war is being fought. But they have everything ready".

Dhritarashtra began to whimper again. His son got really annoyed. He said: "My dear father, please do not lose confidence. I am more powerful. Can you not see that they are now just beginning to be afraid?" Dhritarashtra would not be convinced. He knew that the words of Sanjaya were true. He said: "War is not desirable. It is wrong, as Yudhishthira says. It is not right that we should enjoy his half of the kingdom. Please give it up. You and I will be praised by all the good men in the world. Let us try to save our reputation. All the kings assembled here would rather not fight. They are here because peace seems to be against your grain. If you agree to make peace with the Pandavas, and return their kingdom to them, every one of these warriors will bless you. I am certain about it".

Duryodhana began to lose his temper. He said: "Very well. I do not want anyone to fight unwillingly. Let them all go away from here. I have Dussasana and I have Radheya. Three of us can manage to rout the army of the Pandavas. I cannot hear any more talk of this peace with the cousins. I will not return their kingdom to them. I will not give even the land covered by the tip of a needle. That is certain. I mean to fight". There was silence for a moment when he said this. As an afterthought, Duryodhana said: "They are getting afraid already. Yudhishthira says that he will be satisfied with five villages. I can of course, afford to give it. I can afford to give him his half of the kingdom. It is because I do not want to give it, that I am so adamant. If I give him these five villages, then I might as well admit that I am in the wrong. I was all these days under the impression that Yudhishthira was brave and wise. I cannot understand this his request for five villages. It is ridiculous".

Vidura got up and said: "Yudhishthira is not a fool. He has asked you for these five villages in particular. He could have asked for just any five. Why should he have mentioned the names? I will tell you. He knows full well that you are not going to listen to anyone. He knows that he will have to fight for his kingdom and kill you all for the sake of that kingdom. This request of his for five villages is just a reminder to you and to the elders of this court, in particular, about the sufferings of the Pandavas. Even one of the names is significant.

"Take Varanavata. It reminds everyone of the infamous plot at Varanavata when you and your uncle instigated Purochana to build the palace of lac. It was a dastardly plot to kill your cousins. Yudhishthira wants to remind you and us about it. Then comes the name

Indraprastha. That is the next injustice done to them. You must remember that your father decided to give them half the Kuru land. This was after their wedding Draupadi. The half which was given to them was the barren land called Khandavaprastha. They got the help of Indra to make it fruitful. That is why Yudhishthira mentions Indraprastha as one of the villages he wants. Then comes Jayanta. Surely, surely you could not have forgotten the hall you built after you came back from the Rajasuya! Jayanta is a suburb of Hastinapura and there was built the hall which was the excuse which brought the Pandavas to Hastinapura. Yudhishthira wants us to remember that the game of dice has not been forgotten by him. The fourth is Vrikaprastha. That was where Bheema was fed with poisoned food by you. That is the place adjoining the coppice, Pramanavata. That is where the Pandavas spent the first night of their twelve years' exile. He has allowed you to choose the fifth village yourself. It makes up the rest of the injustices done to them by you.

"Now, can you see how angry and sarcastic Yudhishthira can be if be wants to? This is just his way of saying: 'After all this, you want us to be patient. My uncle says that I am bent on war. Which man will be patient after all these things have happened to him? It is possible to avert the war only if my kingdom is returned to me'. That is the message of Yudhishthira to all of you".

Dhritarashtra was terribly upset by the words of Vidura. He saw the wrath of his nephew. The request for five villages was a poison barb which went right into his heart and hurt him terribly. He tried once again to talk about the greatness of the Pandavas. He said: "Agni, the lord of fire, was satisfied by Arjuna during the burning of the Khandava forest. He will now try to return this kindness of Arjuna. He is sure to help Arjuna during the war. The gods, Indra, Vayu, Yama and the Aswins will certainly help their sons. The gods will help them in their fight against Bheeshma and Drona and all of you. Varuna has given his bow and quivers to Arjuna. The Pandavas are so powerful that it will not be possible to defy them. When Bheema met the great Hanuman in the mountain Gandhamadana, Hanuman agreed to sit on the banner of Arjuna. That shows that divine help is on the side of the Pandavas. Let us not defy them. Let us call for peace".

Duryodhana's patience had reached its limit. He became furious with his father. He said: "My dear father, surely you are spending sleepless nights without any reason for it. Why should you be sure that the gods will help the Pandavas? You are so wise. Do you not know the definition of God? The sage Vyaasa and the great Narada have told us that the gods are those who are beyond desire and envy and greed. They are beyond the emotions of this world. They have

no attachments and they have no enmities. They are indifferent to the affairs on this world of men. The gods, surely, do not fight as we do, because of avarice and greed! They are busy with affairs worthy of themselves. This world and her troubles are too far beneath them to be noticed by them. I do not believe that your ideas are right. If Indra, Yama, the Aswins and Vayu are indeed interested in their children, surely they would have done something already! They would not have stood by when their children passed through all that suffering during the past thirteen years! They are not to be feared since they are charmed by Dharma and nothing else.

"I have been a good king. The gods know it. All my subjects speak well of me. There are no extremes in my land. The rains fall at the proper times. All are happy in my reign. I am speaking about my righteousness. Not that I want to brag. A real man must not talk about himself. But I have to speak like this since it is essential that you should be convinced. I have ruled my kingdom well. I have not overstepped the rights of a king. Ask of my subjects. Ask of my friends. They will tell you the same thing. The gods cannot accuse me of evil since I have been a righteous ruler. Please rest assured that we will win the war. No god can come and disturb us and our peace of mind".

Duryodhana got up abruptly and walked out of the court. He was not pleased with the words of the elders. Radheya walked with him. All the others left the court one by one as soon as the Prince left. The hall was empty except for Dhritarashtra and his charioteer. It was pathetic to see the old king, alone, without any hope of his sons' living through the war. It was hard for him to face the consequences of his sins.

Chapter 10

KRISHNA LEAVES FOR HASTINAPURA

After the departure of Sanjaya, Yudhishthira remembered Krishna's offer to go to Hastinapura on a peace mission. He called for a council of all his brothers and friends. He spoke to Krishna. He said: "Krishna, the time has come when we are forced to make a decision. You are the only person to whom we turn at times of trouble. You are the one who must make our decisions for us. You are our very life. It is up to you to do what is good for us. For our sake you must go to Hastinapura and speak to our uncle and his son. You heard the message of our uncle. It was couched in words which sounded very

gentle at the beginning and became unbearable later on. The king has no thought of right and wrong. With his intelligence clouded by his love for Duryodhana, the old king refuses to face truth. Knowing the state of affairs, he has the audacity to ascribe sin to me. He speaks cruel words. His avarice is incurable. After the game of dice we went to the forest thinking that the king would adhere to his share of the bargain. But now he refuses to give me back my kingdom and he persists in this injustice. He should have behaved like a father towards us. Instead, he is behaving like a thief. Can anything be more terrible than this?

"I do not want war. I am sorry I have been born a kshatriya. If I had been a sudra I could have worked for a living: if a vaisya, I could have been a buyer and seller of goods: if a brahmin, I could have begged for alms. But a kshatriya can only give. He must never receive alms. I have got to fight and destroy this entire world because of the avarice of my uncle. I have to see the death of all those who are near and dear to me, because of my uncle. I will get infamy if I desist from fighting. Between two kshatriyas who hate each other, peace is not possible. Hatred is the only reply for hatred. And yet, Krishna, I am trying for the impossible. I am hoping that your journey will achieve this impossible dream of mine: friendship between me and Duryodhana. You must go and try your best to make them agree to my proposal of peace. I am hoping that you will be able to do it".

Krishna said: "Yudhishthira, I will certainly try to do what is best for both the parties. If I am able to avert the war, glory will be mine. Mine will be the joy of having saved the world from destruction. I will try to release all the kings of the world from the noose of death which they are wearing like garlands round their necks. I will try my best".

Yudhishthira said: "I am afraid to send you to them. You are our most precious possession. I know that the sinful Duryodhana may try to harm you. I know him. If I should lose you, I cannot live a moment longer". Krishna smiled and said: "You are right. I know that Duryodhana will try to hurt me. I know the sinful nature of the uncle of Duryodhana too. If they do any mischief, then I will not wait for the war to destroy them. I will kill every one of them and save you the bother. Do not worry about me. But I have a feeling that my embassy is going to be fruitless. I listened to the words of Sanjaya. Even after having heard it, you are trying to be friendly towards them. I do not think it befits a kshatriya to be so gentle and so compassionate. You are a kshatriya. A kshatriya should welcome victory or death on the field of battle. Do not be overcome by this weakness, Yudhishthira. It is not proper that you should think of them as your relatives. You

must not feel guilty about it. A kshatriya has no relatives. He has either friends or enemies. There is no third category in the lexicon of a king. Even for a moment they have not thought of you as a relative, a cousin, a brother. Not even the elders of the court. They have been quite indifferent about the fate of a good and gentle person like you. They all, all of them, ought to be killed for this.

"When the game of dice was being played, when Draupadi was dragged by that Dussasana into the court, when Radheya and his friend insulted her and you with the harshest words imaginable, when the five of you with Draupadi walked in the streets of Hastinapura, when all these things happened, I say, the elders of the Kaurava court did nothing to stop the actions of those sinners. I cannot understand your love for them. You consider them worthy. You consider them as your relatives, elders, as people worthy of respect from you, who is the most worthy of respect. When Draupadi said, 'It is no sabha where there are no elders: they are no elders who do not speak what is righteous: where there is no truth there is no righteousness: nor is it truth when it is wedded to obstinacy', when she said that, she spoke the truth. The court of Hastinapura is a nest of sin. It is high time we destroy it. Your grandfather does not remember that he is your grandfather. He is going to be the first man to fight with you. Why do you still suffer from this misplaced affection? Except for the name of the House to which you both belong, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, in common between you and Duryodhana. Why do you grieve? The whole crowd has to be annihilated like a poison tree with all its roots and branches. It is a nest of vipers. Destroy it. I am going to Hastinapura. I know that there will be no peace between you and your cousin. My purpose in going to Hastinapura is this. I am going to explain to all the citizens of Hastinapura and to the kings and others who are there to help Duryodhana, the truth about everyone. I will show them your character as against that of the Kaurava monarch and his father. Let the world know what the truth is. Let them know the nobility and the goodness of the man whom they are going to fight. I will do my best to represent your cause to the people in general and come back having achieved what is good for you. I know that Duryodhana will not part with the kingdom. During my absence, please make arrangements for the war. With my return the war will begin".

Bheema spoke. He said: "Krishna, if you can bring about peace between the proud Duryodhana and the Pandavas, I will be very happy. Do not try to frighten Duryodhana with the power of the Pandava army. He is very proud and very arrogant. Try and use gentle words while talking to him. He is obstinate. He will never give up his ideas. We used to be playmates once. I know him. Please do not enrage

him and cause the death of the kings of the world. I agree with my brother. There is nothing like peace. Please make it possible for us to live in peace with them. Please convince our dear grandfather that they should abandon the idea of war. The best thing is to avert war. I am sure my dear Arjuna will agree with me and understand my feelings".

A moment of silence: then Krishna burst out laughing. He laughed loud and long on hearing the words of Bheema. It was the last thing he expected. This plea for peace from Bheema was something he could not grasp. It was impossible to believe it. He would sooner believe that fire had lost its heat and become cool as snow. Krishna wanted to rouse the spirits of Bheema and rekindle the spark in him. He said: "What is this I hear, Bheema? Till yesterday you were all praises for war. You were looking forward to killing the sons of Dhritarashtra. During the last thirteen years you have not had a single night of sleep. You have never had peace. You were always speaking words of wrath. You would sigh like an angry serpent and wring your hands in helpless fury against your brother who would ask you to be patient. Your mind would be fuming as the fire does though covered by ashes. You would never mix with the others. You would sit alone like a weak man oppressed with a great burden. People would think that you were mad, when they heard you talk to yourself with your eyebrows knitted, with your forehead wet with sweat. You would uproot trees in sudden fury. You would weep angry tears alone. You would laugh like one possessed. You would suddenly shout, 'The lotus may bloom on the mountain top. The sun may alter his course and rise in the west. But I will not swerve from my oath. I will break the thigh of that sinner.' So saying, you would lift your mace aloft and shake it in the air. How am I to believe that it is the same Bheema who now wants peace? You were eager for war. But now that war is near, your heart is fainting at the thought of it. You are losing courage. I see that the mind of man is susceptible to the slightest change. Your mind has become clouded, Bheema. The raft of the Pandavas threatens to sink and with you will sink all of them. I am sorry to see this cowardice which has come over you".

Krishna's words had the desired effect. He saw the eyes of Bheema getting red. He said: "Bheema, remember your bravery of the past. Remember that you are a kshatriya. Remember the sins of your cousins whom you have sworn to kill. Make your mind firm against these feelings of affection which try to be remembered. Stubborn your will with steel. Peace does not suit you. You cannot live in peace, Bheema, until you kill all of them. Come, rouse up your sleeping self!"

Bheema looked at him with angry eyes and said: "Krishna, you

have misunderstood me and my words entirely. You know fully well the agony I have been suffering for the last so many years. Yet you hurt me with these cruel words. Having known me for these many years you dare to call me a coward. There is no one to equal me in valour. When war breaks out you will see whether I am speaking the truth or if I am just bragging. No one will be able to withstand me and my anger. I will kill all the enemies of the Pandavas. You do not seem to know me. Once the Kauravas get caught in my arms nothing can rescue them. You can see me as I really am only when the war begins. I will look like the God of Death when I cut through the enemy ranks with my mace uplifted. I am not afraid. My brow is not wet with sweat because I am afraid. My body is burning but not because of fear. I was overcome with pity for humanity and so I thought that the world will be benefitted if war is averted. This was the only reason for my talking for peace. Please do not call me a coward. I am not".

Krishna took his hand in his and smiled at him. He said: "No, Bheema. I know that you are anything but a coward. I just wanted to rouse your spirits. I know that you are the strongest person on our side. We are depending on you to win this war. I wanted to know your real feelings. That is why I taunted you. I know the future. The Kauravas are not going to agree to this proposal of peace. There is going to be a war. I wanted to prepare your mind. I wanted to gladden your heart. That is why I spoke like this. Now I can go without worry". Bheema was pacified.

Arjuna said: "Krishna, Yudhishthira has told you everything. Your words appeal to me. I have the same feeling as you have. They will not be for peace. You must talk in such a way that the dignity of our king Yudhishthira is not injured. I know this too. Anything which you desire will happen. There is nothing that is impossible for you. You can make people do what you want them to do. Your will will be done. I am not worried about the future. If you think that the war should be averted you can certainly make them all think so, even Duryodhana. If you think that they ought to be killed and that the earth should be cleansed, you will arrange that too. You know what is best for the world and for the Pandavas. The future of the Pandavas is in your blessed hands. Do what you will with us. We are happy in the thought that you are with us".

Krishna said: "Arjuna, you are not quite right. I know that fate is more powerful than all the work of man. I cannot achieve something divine. I can only try to coax them to be good. You are wrong in thinking that I can do anything with them. They are not like clay in my hands. How can you expect good from that crowd? Duryodhana

has deliberately chosen the path of evil that leads to damnation. They cannot be made to see reason. Duryodhana and his associates are doomed. I cannot work a miracle to save them. It is beyond my power. I am going because I do not want the world to attach any blame to the name of Yudhishthira who is the most righteous of all men". Krishna's eyes were red and wet with the emotion in his heart.

Nakula gave his opinion. He said: "You have heard the words of my brothers. I will now tell you what I feel. I request you to do as you think will be suitable. The thoughts of man change according to the change in circumstances. We had one set of ideas and thoughts when we were in the forest. There, we were living like the rishis. We did not think much of the kingdom we had lost. It did not mean much to us then. When we were in Virata our thoughts were bent only on the end of the exile, the end of the year and the end of our troubles. But now that it is all over, the thoughts of the kingdom we lost are predominant in our minds. We have decided that the kingdom must be given back to us. We have therefore collected seven Akshauhinis with your help. We are now prepared to fight for our rights. Tell Duryodhana gently first and then in harsher terms, our conditions. Frighten him with the size and power of the army we have collected. Let him hear the names of the heroes who have come to help us. He will certainly be frightened. Who will dare to meet all these in war? When *you* are going, I am sure you will achieve what is good for us: for our beloved brother and king, Yudhishthira".

Sahadeva had been listening to all of them. He sprang up from his seat now. He said: "I want you, Krishna, to go and talk in such a way that *war* and only *war* will be the result. Even if the Kauravas ask for peace, *war* it will be. Having seen our dear queen in Hastinapura in the court of those sinners, how can anyone desire for peace with the sons of that Dhritarashtra? Only death can be the answer to Duryodhana. If my brothers Yudhishthira, Bheema, Nakula and Arjuna are for peace, let them have peace. I, for one, will fight a duel with Duryodhana and kill him. Tell him the words I have spoken now. Tell him that he cannot escape death".

Satyaki said: "Sahadeva speaks the truth. Death is the only thing for Duryodhana. Krishna, you saw the Pandavas in the Kamyaka forest dressed in tree barks and deer skin. Having seen them like that, how can you rest in peace until this injustice is avenged? The Kauravas have got to be killed, every one of them". Satyaki was still standing. A cheer rose from all when he spoke these words full of affection for the Pandavas and the words 'Well done', 'Excellent', resounded in the tent of the Pandavas.

Krishna looked at Draupadi who had been listening to all that was being said. With her eyes filled with tears she said: "Glory to Sahadeva and Satyaki who are the only two kshatriyas I can see". She turned to Krishna and said: "You know everything, my lord. I do not have to refresh your memory. I will give you my message. You must not use gentle words or pleadings when you speak to Duryodhana. Only good people should be won over with gentleness. You must punish him. Throw the staff of destruction in the direction of that sinful crowd. See to it that a war is fought. I am not for these vain talks on peace. I want war. I want the entire family of the Kurus to be destroyed. The elders who stood by when I was insulted must all die: every one of them. I do not want you to make Duryodhana see reason. I am not surprised at Yudhishthira asking for peace. What pains my heart is the talk of Bheema and Arjuna and Nakula. You are my only refuge, my Krishna. Please save me from the indignity of being a friend to the Kauravas. I must see them dead. If ever you have held me dear in your heart, if ever you have felt sorry for me and my plight, I charge you on that love of yours for me, to make this war just inevitable. You must insult Duryodhana: taunt him: anger him. Do anything so long as you achieve my purpose. I must have war". She stopped talking. Tears were choking her. Her hot tears moistened her clothes.

She lifted her hair, her long perfumed hair, which looked like a huge big snake. She held it in her left hand and said: "Look at this hair of mine, Krishna. I have not dressed it since the day it has been sullied by the hand of Dussasana. Let all those who want peace with the Kauravas look at this eternal reminder of my shame. In the forest, this my lord Yudhishthira said that we must be patient for thirteen years: that at the end of the thirteen years he would be 'as angry as I pleased'. This, I see, is his anger. I was living in hopes. I thought that I would find them to be men, at least at the end of the thirteen years. But no. They are the same. I think I must agree with Duryodhana when he called them cowards. They are. Even Bheema.

"Krishna, this insult has been rankling in my heart for too long a time. I have had but one desire all these years. I want to see that jewelled hand of Dussasana to be severed from his body and fall on the ground. Till I see that hand which grabbed my hair lying on the ground, my mind cannot rest. This is the one desire which has been lodged in my heart all these years. It is burning me like fire. Only you can help me to have my revenge. I will not see you come back from Hastinapura without declaring war".

Krishna looked at her tear-stained face and said: "Do not weep, Draupadi. Do not weep. Soon, very soon, you will see the queens

of all the kings of this world weep, since they would have lost their everything. All the kings will die. I know it. Do you remember my promise to you in the Kamyaka forest? Again, in Upaplavya, when we met after your exile was over, you worshipped me with milk and wild honey. Do you not remember my words then? I have not forgotten my promise to you. The time has come when the sinful Duryodhana and his associates have to die. With the help of Nakula, Sahadeva, Bheema and Arjuna I will destroy the world. My words are not spoken in vain. I will see to it that they are all killed, Draupadi. Come, wipe your eyes and smile: keep on smiling. The days of weeping are over".

The next day, soon after the sun had risen in the east, the preparations for Krishna's journey to Hastinapura began. His chariot was equipped with all his weapons. Yudhishthira led him to the chariot. Krishna took leave of all of them. Yudhishthira helped him into his chariot. He made Satyaki accompany Krishna. The Pandavas went with the chariot some distance and then bade farewell to Krishna and Satyaki.

CHAPTER 11

HASTINAPURA PREPARES HERSELF

Dhritarashtra heard from his spies that Krishna was on his way. He sent for Bheeshma and Vidura. He wanted Sanjaya to come too. Drona was there, and Duryodhana. Dhritarashtra said: "The great Krishna is coming. He is coming to our Hastinapura to talk about the war. He is a great man. He must be honoured. We must please him in every way. His good wishes are very necessary for us now. Please make all arrangements to receive him properly. Make his journey pleasant throughout. If you please him, my son, he will be favourable to you. What does Bheeshma say?" Bheeshma and the others approved of his suggestions. Duryodhana made all the arrangements. He reported to the King that all the arrangements had been made as per his wishes.

The King told Vidura: "Krishna will halt at the place called Kusasthala tonight and arrive in Hastinapura tomorrow. You must personally supervise the reception that is to be given to the greatest of all men. I want to give him many gems and costly gifts. I want to give

him a chariot and horses and a thousand things. He deserves all this and much more too. I am eager to please him. Do you not approve of my idea?"

Vidura smiled to himself. He said: "Krishna is the greatest person that has been born on this earth, or that will ever be born on this earth. I am amused to see the childish way in which you are talking. You ask me: 'Do you not think it is fitting that we should give gifts to Krishna?' My dear brother, he deserves the entire world. That is not the point. I have been with you ever since we were children. I know you through and through. You cannot conceal anything from me. You are thinking up methods by which you can bribe that great man. How is it you have become suddenly so very generous? You are prepared to give so much to this man who is to talk to you and your son about the Pandavas. You have not the heart to part with even five villages as far as the Pandavas are concerned. You suddenly come out with the suggestion that we should give costly gems and horses and chariots and so many things to this messenger from those nephews of yours.

"You cannot win Krishna over to our side so easily as all that. His life is bound up in that of Arjuna. You think you can buy that great man by your cheap wealth. Please do not insult him. I can tell you, nothing, no amount of coaxing or pleading, can part him from Arjuna and the Pandavas. If you are genuinely interested in pleasing Krishna, do what he asks you to do. Honour him by granting him his wish. He is coming here with the hope of making you and your son realise the horrors of war, of the injustice done to the Pandavas, of your avarice, of your heartlessness in making the kings of this entire world bleed for the sake of your selfishness. Krishna is coming to do good to the House of the Kurus. He wants peace. If you agree to his proposals of peace and stop these preparations for war, your welcome will be a real welcome to Krishna. I wonder if you will do it. I can only hope. You are the father to those fatherless children. Is it, after all, so difficult to show some affection to those poor orphans?"

Duryodhana was listening. He said: "What uncle says is right. Without a doubt Krishna is fond of the Pandavas. Gifts should be given with discretion. There is a time for everything. Father, this idea of yours is stupid. Krishna is no fool. He will laugh at you. Also, he will think that we are frightened and that we are afraid and that we are trying to win his favour. It does not become our dignity to cringe before him like this. It will also be an insult to Krishna. He is the greatest of the great. He should not be insulted by these paltry gifts. Nor is our aim going to be served by him. Let us

honour him. But please abandon this foolish plan of yours. The world will laugh at you".

Bheeshma said: "Whether he is honoured or not is immaterial to Krishna. Even if anyone is foolish enough to insult him he will not take it as an insult. He is too noble to notice these things. He is a truthful man. Nothing can be hidden from him. He is fighting for truth. He is for righting the wrongs done to the Pandavas. He will be most pleased if he hears words that are to his liking. That is what you must do".

Duryodhana said: "This grandfather of mine will always talk about the Pandavas. I have formed a plan by which I can make the Pandavas my slaves. I will imprison this friend of the Pandavas. If I do that what can they do? They will be helpless. I think this plan is an excellent one if only I can carry it out."

Dhritarashtra was horrified at the suggestion. He said: "No, no. Please do not think of that. It is a very wrong thing you are planning to do. Krishna is an ambassador. He is a relative and he is dear to all of us. It is a sin even to think of imprisoning him". Bheeshma was disgusted with Duryodhana. He told Dhritarashtra: "This son of yours is losing his reason. He is just courting misfortune. He is full of sin and so are his friends. He will always ignore the words which are spoken for his good. He is now trying to imprison Krishna. This man does not please me. I do not want to listen to any more words from him". Bheeshma got up from his seat and walked away without speaking a word more.

In the morning Krishna arrived in Hastinapura. Dhritarashtra, accompanied by Bheeshma, Drona and Kripa, went out to receive him. Duryodhana was there with his brothers and Radheya. The streets were decorated. All the citizens welcomed Krishna with smiling eyes and loving words. Krishna entered the palace of the King. Dhritarashtra had ordered a jewelled seat to be placed for him. After greeting the elders and the youngsters, Krishna sat on the jewelled seat with smiles illuminating his beautiful face. After the formal reception was over, Krishna left the palace and went to the house of Vidura. Vidura was immensely proud of the honour conferred on him. He received Krishna with tears of joy. He asked Krishna about the welfare of the sons of Kunti. He listened to the words of Krishna, who gave a vivid account of the happenings of the past few days.

Kunti was staying with Vidura. Krishna went into the chambers of Kunti and met her. She greeted him with a voice choked with emotion. He was moved by her tears. She asked him about her sons. She said: "How is my child Yudhishthira? How is my dear Bheema? He is the favourite of Yudhishthira. He is so used to the

comforts of the palace. How did he spend the last few years in the forest? How is Arjuna? How did he manage to conceal his bravery all these years? How is my beloved Sahadeva? He is so delicate and so sensitive. Though a man, he is still a child. How is my child, Nakula? How is that dark handsome son of mine whose skill in fighting is more beautiful and more graceful than that of Arjuna? How is Draupadi? How did that daughter of fire bear the difficulties which have been forced on her?" Kunti could speak no more. Her grief became renewed on seeing Krishna. He pacified her with sweet words. He said: "Your sons have now become great. They have come out of their exile. They suffered the hardships of the exile with great fortitude. They will now reap the benefits of their long Tapas. Please be happy from now".

CHAPTER 12

KRISHNA AND VIDURA

Krishna went to the palace of Duryodhana. It was beautiful. It was like the palace of Indra. Krishna climbed the steps and entered the great hall. He saw Duryodhana seated on the throne. Sakuni, Dussasana and Radheya were sitting by his side. They all stood up when Krishna entered. They received him cordially. There was placed for him a seat which was fretted with precious stones and inlaid with ivory and gold. Krishna sat down on it with a pleased smile. Duryodhana was talking to Radheya. He now spoke to Krishna. He said: "Krishna, I am feeling very hurt that you have not accepted our hospitality. We have made all arrangements for your stay and for your pleasant amusements. We have prepared excellent food for you. Why do you refuse all this and go to Vidura's house?"

Krishna listened to his complaint. He said: "Why, Duryodhana, you have been entertaining me well. It is no matter if I do not eat in your house. I will eat with you when my work is finished". Duryodhana said: "That is beside the point. Whether your work is finished or not, is immaterial. You are related to us. We have been so anxious to have you as our guest. It is wrong of you to have been indifferent to our hospitality. There is no enmity between you and me. You must not talk like this to us. We are quite fond of you".

Krishna smiled gently and said: "I am afraid I have to be frank

with you. I am not interested in your grand feast. I do not relish food in the house of a person who is not righteous. You have been hating the Pandavas without reason, for the last so many years. The Pandavas are dear to me. I am the soul of the Pandavas. He who is a slave to avarice, and illtreats them, is considered by me to be the lowliest of men. You hate them. So the food which you offer me is the food of an enemy. It must not be eaten. The Pandavas mean my very life to me. Your food is not welcome to me. I will eat only the food given to me by Vidura. He is dear to me and the Pandavas are dear to him".

Krishna got up and walked out. He walked into the street and proceeded towards the house of Vidura. Bheeshma and Kripa walked with him. They said: "Please enter the house we have equipped for you". Krishna said: "Please go back to your palaces. You have enter tained me with your words. I am now going to the house of Vidura". They had to return. Krishna entered the house of Vidura, who received him with great affection. He pleased Krishna with his worship. Krishna ate his food there. He rested for some time.

Night had fallen. After being refreshed by his rest, Krishna got up and sat with Vidura discussing the burning topic of the day. Vidura said: "Krishna, your coming is wrong. The foolish Duryodhana has become immune to good advice. He does not care to listen to anyone. If you talk to him he will not listen. In spite of the advice of all of us he has decided on war. He thinks that he can win the war with the help of Bheeshma, Drona, Kripa, Aswatthama, Radheya and Jayadratha. Looking at the huge army he has collected, he thinks that victory is his. He is sure that Radheya is enough to destroy his enemies. Your words and mine will be disregarded. It will be as useless as playing sweet music to deaf ears. They are all sinners. I do not like the thought of your sitting in the midst of them. Please do not waste your breath in talking to them about peace. I do not like to send you there, to the court of Dhritarashtra. They will insult you, the greatest of men. How can I bear to see you insulted?"

Krishna said: "You are fond of me and you are dear to me. I have no secrets from you. Please listen carefully while I tell you the reason for my coming. I know all that is to happen. I have come with the full knowledge of the probable way the talk will proceed. I have come to try and rescue these people from the death which is imminent. I will achieve great fame, if I am able to do it. Even if I am unable to achieve it, the fact that I tried to save a dying man will be enough for me. If a man thinks sinful thoughts and is not able to translate them into action, even if he has thought wrongly, the sin does

not attach itself to him. And so, if this war can be averted, I think sin cannot be ascribed to Duryodhana and his father. This great danger has now come very near the House of the Kurus. If a man, seeing ruin approach someone, still does not do something to avert it, he is not a man. Even if he has to be dragged by the hair, a doomed man must be saved from the danger that is threatening to engulf him. I am very keen on doing this service to humanity. I am hoping to convince Duryodhana. Yudhishthira has told me that he wants peace. He has asked me to try my best to avert the war. I am very fond of Yudhishthira. He is the greatest man that has been born on this earth. It is an honour to be loved by him. To oblige him I have come on this mission of peace. I know that it is sure to fail. But then, I want to have the feeling that I tried my best.

"There is also this to be said. I want to talk in the court in such a manner that people will see the man Yudhishthira as he really is. I want the world to know the kind of people whom Duryodhana has wronged. I want the kings who have rallied round the serpent banner to see what kind of man Duryodhana is, the man for whose sake they are prepared to lay down their lives. I want Bheeshma, Drona and all the others to see what a sinful course they have adopted in fighting with the Pandavas. The war cannot be averted. But the world will know why the war is to be fought. That is the reason for my coming, Vidura."

Krishna brought the subject to an end and then they talked of many things.

Chapter 13

KRISHNA—THE PEACEMAKER

In the morning, Krishna was just finishing his routine duties, when Duryodhana and Radheya, accompanied by all the Kauravas, came to the house of Vidura to take Krishna to the court. Daruka brought the chariot of Krishna. Krishna ascended the chariot accompanied by Vidura. Duryodhana and Radheya followed him in the chariot of Duryodhana. Satyaki and Kritavarma followed these two. A guard of honour was waiting for Krishna. The reception given to him was very impressive. Many elephants and horses followed his chariot to the palace. All the people in the city had thronged to see the great Krishna.

The procession reached the palace. The noise of the chariots brought all the kings to the gates of the palace. Krishna descended from his chariot. His two palms were held by Vidura and Satyaki. Krishna entered the great assembly hall. Radheya and Duryodhana led him into the hall. Kritavarma followed Krishna. Dhritarashtra and the other elders of the court got up from their seats and honoured Krishna. They waited for him to sit down. He was led to a seat made specially for him. Just before he sat down Krishna chanced to see Narada and other rishis waiting to watch the happenings in the court. He told Bheeshma that rishis were waiting to enter the court. Bheeshma hurried to them and brought them with great respect to the court. All of them were requested to sit on special seats and then, with a smile Krishna sat down. Dussasana led Satyaki to a richly covered seat. Vivimsati, a brother of Duryodhana, did the same thing to Kritavarma. Not too far away from Krishna sat the two friends Duryodhana and Radheya. They shared the same seat. Sakuni was there near them. Vidura was seated on a seat which was touching that of Krishna.

All eyes were turned towards Krishna. They looked and looked and were not satisfied. He was so charming that the eyes were happy to rest on him. His glory lent a brilliance to the great hall. With his favourite jewel Kaustubha on his chest, with his favourite yellow silk draping his dark body, Krishna looked like a dark mountain lit up by the yellow rays of the rising sun.

For a moment there was intense silence. Suddenly Krishna broke it with his voice like the rumbling of distant thunder. He looked at Dhritarashtra. His words were addressed to the King. He said: "I have come to Hastinapura to prevent the death of so many heroes: I have come to bring about peace between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. I do not have to say much. You know everything. This your family is famous. The House of the Kurus is the noblest House in this Bharatavarsha. The scions of your House have been reputed for their great qualities. They have all been endowed with kindness, sympathy, truthfulness, generosity and love of justice. Having been born of such an illustrious race, it is not right that you should be the first person to be so different. It does not become a son of the House of Kurus to do what you are doing. Your sons, my lord, have left justice behind them and are proceeding in the path of sin, like butchers. They have no discipline. They have no respect for elders. They are avaricious. They behave wrongly towards their kinsmen. This should have been known to you already. They have now, knowingly or otherwise, reached a dangerous stage. It is dangerous to them and to the world.

"Because of their indifference to the advice of good people they are threatening to destroy the world. If you really want to, my lord,

you can control them and ask them to make peace with their cousins. Even a difficult thing can be achieved if the will is there to do it. This peace is in your hands. Please be firm with your sons. Establish your authority. All the people here in this great assembly know how necessary it is for you to assert your authority. The Pandavas and the Kauravas will be saved if you interfere in time and do something. Please be warm and guileless towards the sons of Pandu. If this peace is made, there will be no one to equal you. Think of yourself being guarded by the Kauravas and the Pandavas. If you have the protection of the Pandavas there is nothing that you have to fear. With Bheeshma, Drona, Kripa, Radheya, Vivimsati, Aswatthama, Vikarna and Somadatta on one side, supported by Jayadratha and Duryodhana, you will have the added support of Yudhishthira, Bheema, Nakula, Sahadeva, and Arjuna, Satyaki and Abhimanyu. Think of the wonderful army of yours. You will be honoured in this world and in the next world as the greatest man born of the House of the Kurus. You will be lord of the world as you are now. Nothing can oppose you. No one can. If you are friendly with the Pandavas they will conquer for you the world and all its riches. You can be lord of all that.

"Instead of that glory you are courting infamy and destruction. What do you get by this split between the two branches of the same tree? What do you gain by this slaughter of the armies on both sides? With your sons killed in the battle by the great Pandavas, what are you going to achieve? Your sons are powerful fighters: but so are the Pandavas. Please avert the ruin threatening the world. I cannot contemplate without a shudder the war between these cousins. All the kings who have assembled here are bent on dying. Can you not save them all? Please save the world. The Pandavas are good and full of affection for you. Let your sons and their cousins live in peace. Remember the time when they came to you in distress. They had just lost their father. They have lived as your children. It is but right that you should be a father to these orphans. When they are in trouble it is you that should comfort them. Do not kill the natural affection that should be present in your heart. You called them to Hastinapura. You sent them on an exile which lasted so many years. They have suffered so much. They still think of you as their father. You must take advantage of this opportunity and make up for all your past wrong actions. You are familiar with all the rules of conduct. It is but right that you should observe them now. You and your sons are not doing the right thing.

"This assembly is not a proper sabha at all. Where justice is being throttled by injustice, where truth is being overwhelmed by untruth, where all this is happening and the so-called elders allow it and are just

looking on at this continual injustice, it is not a sabha. It is a breeding place of sin. Please do consider my words carefully. Return to the Pandavas the kingdom that is theirs by right. You know very well the nature of Yudhishthira. He will never remember the wrongs of the past. He will be very obedient and affectionate. I am fond of you, my lord. I do not want you to suffer the death of your sons. If you have any desire for peace in aftertimes you must make peace with the Pandavas now".

Everyone was listening as if spell-bound. Krishna finished talking. And yet no one spoke. No one could think of anything to say after the words of Krishna. A few moments later the King began to speak. He said: "Krishna, you have spoken to me about the necessity for peace. Can you not see that I am helpless? I am not the master here. My wishes will not be obeyed. My sons do not care for me and my words. If you can try and convince Duryodhana and Radheya, I will be happy. They will not listen to any words of advice from anyone. Duryodhana is too wilful. His mother Gandhari has tried to talk to him. Vidura has tried his best. So has our Bheeshma. It is all to no purpose. If you can succeed where others have failed I will be eternally grateful to you".

Krishna turned to Duryodhana and said: "Duryodhana, listen to my words. You are a descendant of the great House of the Kurus. You are rich and you are endowed with all the great and noble qualities which are characteristic of that race: the race of the Kurus. Why then, do you behave like this? My dear Duryodhana, only those born of a low family, only those who are of a small nature, will be avaricious and cruel. How is it that you are trying to behave against the traditions of your family? The behaviour of good people is ever in the path of truth. Only evil-minded people will behave in an abnormal fashion. This behaviour of yours is wrong. It will bring eternal disgrace to you and to your name. Please save your soul. Even now it is not too late. Please rescue your brothers and your dear friend from eternal shame. You can do it if you make up your mind. You will be gladdening the hearts of so many people here. Your father, your grandfather, your guru and all your friends will be so very happy if you agree to make peace with the Pandavas. Gladden the heart of your mother Gandhari who is the noblest of all women. Your father is willing to make peace with the Pandavas. Why do you still hesitate? Do not disregard the advice of your elders.

"There are three kinds of people in this world. The first class is made up of those who are righteous by nature. The second class of people have only profit in view. Even if you belong to the second class, it will be profitable to make peace with the Pandavas. You are

hoping to be lord of the world. You are hoping to be that with the help of Radheya, your brothers and Sakuni. It will be more to your advantage if you have the brave Pandavas as your companions. They are definitely superior to your supporters. There is no one to equal Arjuna or Bheema This your grandfather, and all the mighty heroes on your side, cannot equal Arjuna in prowess. If you make friends with them they will surely establish you as the Yuvaraja. Your father will continue to be king. They will be happy with their share of the land of the Kurus. They will not encroach into your territory. Why do you not make them your supporters in war with others? No one can dare to defy you if you have the Pandavas as your allies. Think it over.

"There is a third type of man. He enjoys doing what is wrong. I do not want to believe that you belong to the third type. Can you not recognise fame and glory when they are waiting to be yours? Why do you persist in this enmity? Why are you so blind to the advantages of peace? Make up your mind. Shed off this sinfulness as the serpent does its old skin. Emerge out of it with new brilliance. Give half the land to the Pandavas and save the world from annihilation".

Krishna had finished his talk. Bheeshma spoke words of the same import. He said: "My child, please do not be obstinate. Listen to the words of Krishna. It is not a good thing to disregard his words. He has spoken words full of meaning. Do not bring ruin on this beautiful and glowing Bharatavarsha. With your extreme ego, you are trying to destroy the world. Do not sadden the heart of your noble mother with this your behaviour". Drona too spoke words of gentle persuasion. Vidura said: "I do not feel sorry for you. I am only sorry for Gandhari and your father who have to suffer sorrow in their old age. They will be childless. They will be just helpless and friendless in this wide world. They will suffer for their sin of having for son a sinner and egoist like you".

Bheeshma and Drona spoke again. They said: "So long as this Krishna and Arjuna do not enter the battle-field, so long as the bow of Arjuna, the Gandiva is not making music on the battle-field, so long as Yudhishthira does not look on your army with his burning eyes, you have hopes of living. Bheema, with his eyes red with wrath, will cause havoc in your ranks. Nakula and Sahadeva with Dhrishtadyumna will destroy your army. Please take heed and avert this calamity. Everyone is for peace. Make peace with the Pandavas: return their kingdom to the Pandavas and live".

CHAPTER 14

DURYODHANA'S ANGER

Duryodhana had listened to all these speeches. At last he turned his eyes towards Krishna. He said: "Krishna, you have been talking all this while to me. You talk as though all the blame is to be placed on my shoulders. I have been watching. Your gracious self, my father, my grandfather, my acharya, and Vidura, all of you seem to think that I am to blame for everything that has happened. I do not see what I have done to deserve so much censure. I really have tried to see. But I cannot find that I am in the wrong: let me tell you what happened.

"Yudhishthira played the game of dice willingly enough with my uncle. He lost his kingdom to Sakuni. How is it that I am blamed for that? It is not my fault that he played a bad game. You must have heard that I returned the kingdom and everything else to Yudhishthira immediately. Is it my fault that he lost it all again in the second game that was played? They lost and went to the forest according to the conditions. They are now thinking up many reasons to blame me for their foolishness. Now they have joined the Panchalas and collected an army. They are trying to pick a quarrel with me. We have not hurt them in any way. There is no reason for this war which they have declared on us. As for us, we cannot be frightened. Even if Indra comes to fight with us we are not scared of him. We will not bow down to him in fear. I cannot see anyone strong enough to defeat us in battle. Bheeshma, Drona, Kripa and Radheya are on my side. No one can face them in battle. I am only following the dharma of a kshatriya in preparing to fight with those who are quarrelling with us for no reason at all.

"If I have to, I will die on the battle-field hurt by arrows: or we will make them sleep on a bed of arrows. The dharma of a man who is a kshatriya is just that. If we are killed in the battle we will reach heaven. If death embraces us in the battle, if we are able to die without bowing our head down in front of the enemies, why, that is more than enough. We will not be sorry to die. Which man, born of a kshatriya woman, will give place for fear in his heart? Who will be frightened by the enemy and accept that he is afraid? Who will be false to his noble birth and bringing up, by bowing in front of the enemy with the hope of saving his life? The rule set down for a prince is this: he should always be upright. He should stand erect. He is a man only if he acts. A kshatriya should never bend. He should prefer

to BREAK rather than bend. I have always lived like a king. I have bowed my head down: but that is only to my elders who deserve respect. I have never bent my head down to anyone. Never. This is the rule for a kshatriya and this is the rule I have followed for myself, always. I will never swerve from my dharma.

"As for this kingdom called Indraprastha, my father gave it to them in the olden days. I know it. I admit it. But that will never be restored to them, not as long as I am alive. So long as my father, this king Dhritarashtra is alive, the Pandavas and ourselves must leave our weapons in their sheaths and live as his dependants. When Khandavaprastha was given to Yudhishthira I was a dependant. I was a child and I was not old enough to be consulted. It was given away to them either in ignorance or in fear. I do not know. But now that kingdom will never, never be returned to them, not as long as I am alive. Krishna, remember these words of mine. Note them carefully. Not even land which can be covered by the tip of a sharp needle will be surrendered to the Pandavas by us".

Krishna laughed a strange laugh. It expressed contempt and a great pity for Duryodhana. It was tinged with anger and sorrow. It made the entire assembly tremble with an unknown fear. They had not heard this laughter of Krishna. They had seen his smile. They had seen him frown. They had seen his face grave and serious. They had seen so many different expressions on the mobile features of Krishna. But this strange laughter struck terror into the heart of everyone. Krishna got up suddenly from his jewelled seat. His eyes were crimson with fury. Still he smiled that strange smile and said: "Duryodhana, you seem to desire a bed on the field of battle. So be it. You will get what you want. You have always got what you wanted. Be firm. In a few days you will see a great slaughter. You will meet your death which you seem to love so much. You and your dear advisers will all get what you desire.

"You say that you have not in the least offended the Pandavas. You dare to say *that* in this assembly of wise people who have been familiar with every sin of yours. Let the wise ones hear and decide for themselves whether your words are true or false. Burning with jealousy at the prosperity of the Pandavas you and your uncle Sakuni played a game of dice with the noble-minded Yudhishthira. How can that good man win in this treacherous and infamous game played by your evil-minded uncle? This game is known to rob man of clear thinking. It is the cause of dissension between those who are fond of each other. Such a game you played to deprive them of their belongings. Yet you say that you did them no wrong. Which good man will insult the wife of his brother with the words you spoke? These

men here, these, I say, who are sitting here, were sitting in that assembly too. They have also heard the words you spoke. You had Draupadi dragged to your sinful court by this brother of yours. She is dearer to the Pandavas than their very lives. All of them were silent then. They did not speak a word *then,* since Yudhishthira would not let it be known that the Pandavas overstepped the path of Dharma. All these elders were present when you spoke insulting words to the Pandavas when they were setting out to the forest on the exile. Which good man will behave towards his own people as you have done?

"You, your brother Dussasana and your friend Radheya spoke words which cannot be forgotten in a hurry. They were such terrible words. When the Pandavas were children, you attempted to have them burnt with their mother in Varanavata. This attempt of yours was not successful. But that does not mean that no one knows about it. The whole world knows about it. The Pandavas had to live in hiding for a year in the city called Ekachakra in the house of a brahmin. They had to beg for a living. You have often tried to kill Bheema with poison: with serpents and in a thousand different ways. Your attempts have all failed. You have done all this and yet you say that you have not offended the Pandavas. You refuse to give them their birthright. You will do it only when you are forced to do it. You will fall from this secure position and you will be parted from your wealth and your kingdom. You have behaved most heartlessly towards my friends and you have the audacity to tell me that you have not done anything. You have taken leave of your discerning power. Or else how is it you have chosen war when the advantages of peace are so many? I find that you are the most sinful man on the face of this earth. You disgust me".

Dussasana said: "My dear brother, it looks as though these Kuru elders will bind you up hand and foot and hand you over to Krishna. They are forcing you to make peace with Yudhishthira. This grandfather of ours, Drona and your father and, of course Vidura, are sure to bind up you and me and Radheya and give us up to Yudhishthira". Duryodhana heard these words of his brother. Angry like a serpent, Duryodhana sighed in fury and stood up suddenly. He paused for a moment and he walked out of the great hall. He did not care for any of the great men who had assembled there. He passed them all by without even bothering to look at them. He passed Krishna with his head held high. He strode away from the hall like a lion walking past the lesser animals of the forest. His pride was great. His arrogance was even greater. His ego was incurable. He could not submit to anyone. He would not listen to anyone. He would not sit any more in the court which had dared to pass judgement on him, the great

Kaurava monarch. With him walked out all his brothers, all his counsellors, and all the kings too. The hall was emptying itself rapidly.

Bheeshma was watching the exit of Duryodhana and all his followers. He was sorry for this unfortunate grandson of his. He was angry too. He said: "Krishna, I can see that their hour is come. I tried to avert it. But it is not possible. This man is doomed. The kshatriya clan is doomed. The time is ripe. They will all have to die". Krishna looked at all of them and said: "I blame all of you for this. You are all, all of you, guilty. You should have bound up this sinner long ago and kept him in captivity. The time has come when you should do it. I am saying this for your own good. When my uncle Kamsa was harassing everyone, I killed him. I wanted to save the name of the family. I do not think I did wrong in killing my uncle. Please bind up these four men: Duryodhana, Dussasana, Radheya and Sakuni. Give them up to the noble Pandavas. The wise say that for the sake of the family one can be abandoned: for the sake of the village, the family is to be abandoned: the village, for the sake of the community. For the sake of saving one's own soul, everything should be abandoned. This is the only way to save the kshatriyas from death. I hope you will all listen to me and do what I suggest".

Dhritarashtra heard these angry words of Krishna. He spoke to the wise and gentle Vidura. He said: "Go, my child, and bring Gandhari to the court. With her, I will try to coax my son. She may be able to point out the right path to him. If she can do it, we may be able to avert the great danger that is threatening us". Vidura went at once and brought the noble queen to the court which was almost empty. Gandhari was wise and far-seeing. She knew the difference between right and wrong. She was a great woman. Dhritarashtra spoke to her. He said: "Gandhari, your son has gone too far in the path of sin. He does not pay heed to the words of anyone. He has left the court without any regard for anyone here". Gandhari heard the words of her husband. She said: "Vidura, bring my son to the court". She then spoke to her husband. "This kingdom does not deserve to be ruled by a man who is full of avarice. My son Duryodhana is full of avarice. But, my lord, you, more than my son, have to be censured for this unfortunate happening. In the extreme love you have for your son, you have been unheeding to the rules of conduct. Knowingly and willingly you have accompanied him in the path of sin. He has been possessed by greed and pride. You cannot control him now. It is now too late. In spite of my warning words, you made him the ruler of the kingdom. You are now reaping the fruits of your own foolishness. You have not shown affection towards your kinsmen. Which great king,

so far, has shown differential treatment between two dear relatives? Only you".

Duryodhana entered the court since he had been summoned by his mother. His eyes were still red and blazing with wrath. Gandhari spoke to him. She said: "My dear son, listen to my words. I want you to be happy. It is not easy to be the king of a great land like the Kuru land. You must be fit for it. A man who has these qualities, avarice and pride, cannot rule a kingdom. A man should have all his senses under control if he is to rule a kingdom. You are ill fitted to be a king. You have not conquered self. How can you conquer your enemies? You must consider your weaknesses as your foremost enemies. It is only after subduing them that you can think of subduing others. Come to me and sit by my side. I am your greatest friend. A friend is one who is really interested in the welfare of his friend. I am fond of you. I brought you into this world. When you were born there were several evil omens. But I thought that all that was of no importance since I could not dream that a son born of *me* would ever think of sin. Evidently I was wrong. You seem to be the cause of a great calamity. Please stop it. Listen to the words of all of us. You think that Bheeshma, Drona and your Radheya will be able to defeat the Pandavas. Do not be foolish. Think of Krishna and Arjuna. They are Nara and Narayana. They have Dharma on their side. Where there is Dharma there Victory is. They are here to kill all of you. Listen to my words and be happy". Dhritarashtra once again tried to join his wife's plea. Duryodhana was standing with a frown on his face. He was listening and at the same time not listening to his mother. Now, without even a word, he turned his face away from all of them and walked out of the court.

Chapter 15

VISWAROOPA

Duryodhana went straight to Radheya, Sakuni and Dussasana. He told them: "They have now brought mother to the court. I was made to listen to the same words of advice. I am getting sick of this: I have been advised too much and too long. It is time we put a stop to this. I do not want any more of these well-wishers and their words." Dussasana said: "I am sure they are planning to bind up the four of us and deliver us to Yudhishthira. Father will now allow the others

to do it". Duryodhana sighed with impatience. They conferred for a while. The king said: "This Krishna is advising them to bind us up. Let us do the same thing to him before he does it to us. We will make Krishna our captive. I have been thinking on this for a long time. We will tie up this tiger. When the Pandavas hear about this they will lose all their spirit. They will be like snakes whose fangs have been removed. If we can achieve this, the Pandavas will turn their face away from war. Let us hurry and do it".

Satyaki was prepared for something of this sort. He could guess the intentions of these sinners. He found out for certain what the plot was. He hurried to Kritavarma and said: "Your dear friend and his friends are planning to capture Krishna. We must hurry up. You must go immediately and collect our army. Before you come, I will enter the council hall and tell Krishna about their plan". Satyaki rushed to the hall. He broke the news to Krishna. Dhritarashtra and Vidura and the others were there. Satyaki said: "Look on the madness of your son, my lord. He is trying to hold fire in a piece of silk. I think he is either a fool or a madman to think of it". Vidura was horrified. He began to lament the fate of the sons of the king and the sorrow of the old king in his old age. Krishna smiled and pacified him. He said: "Do not fear. It is not so very easy to capture me. Your son has done everything sinful. This is but the final act. Let us wait and see". Dhritarashtra was in a panic. He sent for Duryodhana. He came. The old father said: "Steeped in sin as you are, I never thought that you would descend to this. What madness is this, that you are planning? You are trying to capture Krishna, the greatest of men! How can you dare to do such a thing? The gods cannot do it. The sages have not been able to do it. You are more foolish than a child which tries to catch the moon with his hands. You do not know who he is. You can more easily catch the wandering breeze with your two hands: or the sun with your two bare hands. It is easier to hold the weight of this earth with your hand. But you cannot capture this great man". Krishna smiled at Duryodhana and said: "You poor fool, you think that I am alone and that you can capture me. I am sorry for you and your inane thoughts."

Even as they were talking the hall was being filled up slowly. Krishna said: "Look, they are all here: the Pandavas, the Andhakas and the Vrishnis: the twelve suns and the eleven Rudras: the eight Vasus. You can see all of them". Krishna laughed loud and long. His face had taken on an unusual radiance.

Even as he was smiling, the form of Krishna began to glow like lightning. All the devas emerged out of his body. They could be seen. But by the side of Krishna whose form had now assumed a

terrifying aspect, they looked smaller than the thumb of the hand. On his forehead could be seen Brahma, the Creator. On his huge chest could be seen the eleven Rudras. On his shoulders could be seen the lords of the four quarters: Indra, Varuna, Kubera and Yama. Agni could be seen glowing from his mouth. The Adityas who were twelve in number, and the Vasus and the Asvin twins, the Maruts and all the gods of the heavens could be seen in his form. Out of his left hand could be seen the heroes on the side of the Pandavas. Balarama was seen to emerge from his left hand and on his right could be seen Arjuna with the Gandiva in his hand. Behind him were Bheema, Nakula, Sahadeva and Yudhishthira. All the heroes of the Vrishni and Andhaka clan were seen standing by his side with their arms and armours.

The arms of Krishna were many. They held all the weapons. There could be seen the reputed Sankha called Panchajanya, the Chakra called Sudarsana, the Gada called Kaumodaki and the Sword by name Nandana. Fire could be seen flaming out of his eyes and his nostrils. His aspect was terrible. It looked as though Death, which has no shape, had now decided to take shape and reveal to the world her dread form. No one had the power to look on this unique spectacle. The human eyes were dazzled by the splendour and terribleness of Krishna. Many eyes were closed. But the eyes of Bheeshma, Drona, Vidura and the great Rishis who had assembled there, would not close even for a moment. They were drinking him with their eyes. The Lord had given them power to stand before Him and look at Him with their human eyes. There then happened a miracle. The king Dhritarashtra who was blind, was now granted eyes to see Krishna. He was looking and still looking. He had the great good fortune of seeing the Lord when his eyes were opened.

Heavenly music could be heard everywhere. Flowers rained incessantly. Dhritarashtra looked at Krishna. Tears ran down his aged cheeks. He prayed to Krishna. He said: "You are the Lord of this earth. I have been able to see you. Having seen you, I do not want to see anything else. Please take away this sight from me. I do not want it". Krishna granted him his wish.

The earth was shaken by an upheaval. There was a terrible earthquake. The oceans began to get dried up. People were terrified. Taking pity on the earth, Krishna resumed his original form. He took Satyaki and Vidura by their hands and went out of the hall. He took leave of all the rishis who had assembled there. They went away too, after the departure of Krishna. The entire assembly of kings and the others followed Krishna like smoke following in the wake of fire. Kritavarma had just brought the army to the palace gate. He brought the chariot to the front of the assembly hall. He saw Krishna coming out of it.

Krishna would not speak a word to the many kings who followed him. He did not take leave of anyone. Kritavarma saw a great sadness in the eyes of Krishna.

Krishna heard the voice of Dhritarashtra: "Krishna, you have seen for yourself the power I have over my son. You came here with the hope of bringing about peace between these warring cousins. Please do not have any bad feelings about me. I do not hate the Pandavas. You saw how I have tried to convince my son. What can I do?" Krishna heard his words. In the act of leaving, Krishna paused with one foot on the footboard of the chariot. He turned his head and said: "I am speaking to all the elders of this great assembly. You have all seen how much I tried to avert this war. You saw what happened in the court today. You all saw how Duryodhana left the court flaunting his pride in my face. Now Dhritarashtra too declares that he is powerless. I take leave of you all. I am going back to Yudhishthira".

Krishna's chariot moved fast. He was speeding towards the house of Vidura where he had to take leave of Kunti, his aunt. He reached the house soon. After greeting Kunti with his prostrations Krishna told her about the happenings in the court. He said: "This forest of kings will soon be burnt by the fire called the Pandavas". He was silent for a while. Then he said: "I have to go back now. Let me take leave of you. Please give me your message to the Pandavas. I will tell them how I found you and how eager you are to see them". Kunti said: "Tell my sons that they are all kshatriyas; that they are the sons of Kunti; that there were heavenly voices heard when they were born; that I expect them to behave as kshatriyas. Tell Draupadi that I am proud to have her as my daughter. They are all protected by you, Krishna. I have no worry. Go in peace, my child". Krishna took leave of her and left for Upaplavya.

As soon as Krishna left the hall Duryodhana stormed at everyone and said: "Let the preparations for war begin at once, this very moment. I cannot eat or sleep until this war begins". The eleven Akshauhinis were asked to proceed towards the field called KURUKSHETRA, as early as possible. Dhritarashtra and Bheeshma with Drona and Vidura tried once again to talk to him. But they could not move him. He decided to win or to die.

CHAPTER 16

"SURYA IS YOUR FATHER"

Just before Krishna left for Upaplavya, he took Radheya in his chariot along with Satyaki. He took him to a place far removed from the haunts of men. He left Satyaki in the chariot and walked some distance with Radheya's hand linked in his. Suddenly he began to speak. Krishna said: "Radheya, you are a good man. You have ever been true to Dharma. Why do you support this sinful Duryodhana? You are well versed in the Vedas and the Vedangas. You have mastered all the holy books and you know the very heart of righteousness. You know dharma with its subtle shades which are so many. Why then, do you do this sinful act?"

Radheya smiled and said: "You are right, my lord. A righteous man should not side with a sinner. But Duryodhana is different. I love him. I love him too much to judge him as others do. He has been my friend. The world has looked askance at me and my valour. It is because I am a sutaputra. But Duryodhana is the one man who is above all that. Never once has he remembered that I am a sutaputra. Krishna, you may know about it, or you may not. But once, in the city of Hastinapura, many years ago, I came in search of a living. There was a tournament going on there. The princes had just finished their training under the great Drona. This same Drona had refused to teach me anything since I was a sutaputra. I went to Bhargava for my learning. You must know that I was cursed by him too because I was a sutaputra. Well, as I was saying, the princes of the Kaurava House had just finished their training under Drona. My visit coincided with a great display of the skill of all the princes. I was just standing by. I had no intention of announcing myself. But the smug conceit of Arjuna was just intolerable. I just had to challenge him. I did and I was not allowed to fight with him since I was a sutaputra. When I was being insulted by your beloved Pandavas, it was this noble-minded Duryodhana who took up my side. He made me king of Anga. We clasped hands. I asked him what I could do in return for his regal gesture. 'Nothing', he said, 'I want just your heart'.

"Krishna, my lord, years have gone by since this incident took place. But my heart has always been with this king. I can never pass my judgement on him. I have only two people who love me and they are Duryodhana and Radha my mother. I live just to please

these two. I am not very enamoured of this life of mine. But as long as I am alive, this heart belongs to these two and only to these two".

Krishna was silent for a moment. Then he looked at Radheya and said: "Yes, the debt of gratitude is the most difficult to pay. Radheya, I suppose you know about your birth? Do you know who you are? Do you know your mother?" Radheya smiled and shook his head. He said: "Not much, my lord. But I know that some high-born maiden must have borne me when she was a young girl. She must have lived in the palace of a king. I have a feeling she was a princess. I know too that her palace was on the banks of a river. This girl, evidently, was more fond of her reputation than her newly-born child. She abandoned me. She placed me in a box and set me afloat on the river which hugged her palace walls. Why should I bother to find out who she is? She has not bothered about me. She has forgotten me. She must now be having some more children. I am sure they are more fortunate than I was."

Radheya paused for a few moments. His lips were curled up in a smile half sad and half sneering. Krishna was looking at him with a strange expression in his eyes. Radheya resumed his talk. He said: "But, Krishna, really, I have no regrets. I have a lovely and loving mother. No one can be like her. She is proud of me. But why this talk of my birth and my mother now? That is all dead and buried in the distant past. Let us talk about the present".

Krishna smiled at him. He looked at Radheya with great affection and great pity. His eyes were wet. His voice was very gentle. He said: "Radheya, you are right. Your mother was a high-born maiden. When you were born she had to abandon you because she was afraid of the censure of the world. She was a princess. She has children now: more than one. But her heart is empty. She thinks of only you, the beautiful child born with the Kavacha and the Kundalas whom she abandoned long ago. Her heart is aching for you". Radheya was amazed to hear this. He said: "But that means that I am not a sutaputra! I am a kshatriya! Can this be true? You talk as though you know who my mother is. Krishna, do you know her? Is she alive? Can I see her? Tell me everything. I am eager to know who I am. Please do not keep up this suspense".

Krishna took Radheya's hand in his. He made him sit down. He said: "Radheya, prepare yourself to hear the truth. Your mother is the mother of five sons: five heroes who have no equals in this entire world". Radheya's heart was beating fast. His breath was coming in gasps. He said: "Five sons! Five heroes who have no equals in this entire world! Surely, surely you do not mean the Pandavas!" His frame was trembling with emotion. He looked at Krishna. Krishna

was trying to speak as softly as he could. He said: "Yes, Radheya. They are the Pandavas. The Pandavas are your brothers. Kunti is your mother. You are her eldest son. Your birth happened before she was married to Pandu".

Radheya gasped out: "My father! Who is my father? Please tell me that". Krishna said: "This god whom you worship everyday, this god whom you have chosen as your Ishtadaiva, this Surya is your father". Radheya fainted away. Several moments passed. Radheya woke up. He turned his pathetic eyes towards Krishna. He said: "Indeed, I am the most unfortunate of all beings. Surya is my father. The great Kunti is my mother. The five Pandavas, the noble Yudhishthira, the mighty Bheema, the chivalrous Arjuna, the handsome Nakula, the wise Sahadeva are all my brothers. And I have been a sutaputra to the world all these years. Why, Bhargava with his inner eye must have known who I am. That is why he cursed me. God, how can I get used to the idea that the Pandavas are my brothers?" Tears flowed from his eyes. There was no way of stopping them. So they sat silent, Krishna and Radheya, for a while.

Suddenly Radheya wiped his eyes with his forearm and said: "Krishna, my lord, you must have known this truth for the last so many years. Why was I not told? Why do you tell me all this now? Ignorance was bliss. For the last so many years I have been wanting to know who my mother is. Now you tell me. Why did you tell me now? I was very happy hating the Pandavas. Now you have come and upset my mental balance. Why did you do it? You must have a reason for this action of yours. Why did you tell me now? Why?"

Krishna's eyes were full of compassion. He said: "I wanted to save you from certain death, Radheya. I want you to live. You know all about dharma. You know that a son born to a woman when she was a maiden, becomes, by law, the son of the man she marries. Accordingly, you are a Pandava. You are the eldest of the Pandavas. You are a Pandava on your father's side. You are a Vrishni, my cousin, my relative, on your mother's side. Come with me now. I am going to Yudhishthira. Your brothers will fall at your feet. All the kings who have assembled to help the Pandavas will honour you as the eldest Pandava. You will be crowned by them as their king. You will be the king and Yudhishthira will be the Yuvaraja. He will lead the white horses of your chariot to your presence and lift you to your seat. The dark and beautiful Draupadi will belong to you, since you are a Pandava. Yudhishthira will get into the chariot after you. The mighty Bheema will hold the umbrella over your head. Your younger brother Arjuna will be your charioteer. He will hold the reins of

your horses. Nakula, Sahadeva and I will be walking behind your chariot.

"My dear Radheya, you are a great archer. You are like Arjuna in that. You are very righteous. You are like Yudhishthira in that. You are very affectionate. You are like Bheema in that. Your mastery over the art of fighting is so very graceful. You are like Nakula in that. You are very handsome and very wise. You are like Sahadeva in that. I am surprised that no one has noticed all this all these days. Your dark days are over, Radheya. Come with me. I will make you king of the world. More than that, you will find five brothers and a mother who has been longing for you. Come".

Radheya looked long and steadily into the eyes of Krishna. He said: "In your affection for me you have told me about my brothers. I am certainly a Pandava according to law. Kunti gave birth to me. All that is true. But, my lord, she threw me away. She did not want me. Atiratha found me floating on the river Ganga and he gave me to his wife Radha. She took me into her bosom with affection. Her breasts were full of milk when she took me in her arms. She became my mother. I feel that *she* is my mother and not Kunti. Without being my father, Atiratha has given me the affection of a father. *He* is my father. My heart is bound up in them. I cannot disengage my heart from that bondage. Not all the wealth of this world, nor heaps and heaps of gold, nor any newly found joy nor fear can make me swerve from the path of truth. I cannot be false to myself. I owe a debt of love to Duryodhana. He is my friend. I have followed a certain pattern of life. I have formed my friendships and my loves and my enmities. My friendship with Duryodhana is the greatest event in my life. Hard in its wake follows my enmity with the Pandavas. I have sworn to fight to a finish, a duel with Arjuna in the war. No amount of temptation can lure me to be false to my friend. Your temptation is great. You dangle in front of me a name, great fame, and a wealth of affection from six noble souls. But you cannot tempt Radheya. I am very jealous of my name and my reputation, Krishna. If I do not fight this promised duel with Arjuna what is to become of my name? My fame? I am keen on only one thing: a good name. I know you mean well. You want to save me and so you are calling me. The Pandavas are protected by you. They cannot be defeated in the war.

"Krishna, I am with the doomed man, Duryodhana. I will die for him. That will be glory for me. I cannot have the affection of the great Pandavas. But then, I have never been fortunate. I have been the chosen target of fate. The one pleasure to which I was looking forward was the duel with Arjuna. In your affection for Arjuna you

have now ruined my morale. Knowing that he is my younger brother, how can I fight with him? But, I must fight. Krishna, you knew that I would not abandon my friend. Why then, did you have to tell me the secret of my birth today? I wish I could be angry with you for this your doing. Yet, I cannot be. I feel that you are also interested in me and in my welfare. If you are really and genuinely interested in my welfare, in my getting a good name, will you do me just one favour?"

Krishna, who had been listening with his eyes downcast, looked up suddenly. His eyes were bright with unshed tears. He said: "Certainly I will do it". Radheya took the right hand of Krishna in his and said: "Promise me that you will keep this a secret till my death. If the noble and righteous-minded Yudhishthira knows that I am his brother, his elder brother, he will not accept the kingdom for himself even if he wins it. He is a righteous man. Let him be king. I know that he will be monarch of this world. He has Krishna to guide him through life. He has Arjuna to fight for him. His commander is Bheema. Nakula and Sahadeva are the chief fighters on his side. I know that he is going to win.

"Ours is a lost cause. But, Krishna, unsuccessful life, like love unreturned, has its own rainbow. You cannot have a rainbow in life unless there are tears to be lit up by the setting sun. Mine is such a life. I am hoping for this rainbow to light up the last few days of my life and illuminate my path to dusty death. Krishna, you are now trying to cloud my mind with these new affections thrown in my path. But my path is clear to me. Krishna, perhaps, this is the last time we meet as friends. We are parting from each other. We will meet again on the battle-field. I may be able to cross the great ocean called the war. If I do, why, I will meet you. But I know that I will not be able to live through the war. I will be killed. I am hoping to reach heaven because of my death on the battle-field. I know very well that I will die on the battle-field. I am sure of the fact that the Pandavas are going to win this war".

"What makes you so sure?" asked Krishna with a smile. Radheya said: "I know it. The war which is to be fought on the field called Kurukshetra is a sacrifice. You are the master of ceremonies and Arjuna is the star performer. The other brothers will all be puppets in your hands. You are going to move them hither and thither. The end is clear to me. The sons of Dhritarashtra and all of us, Bheeshma, Drona, myself and all the kings of the earth are meant to reach the heaven meant for those who die on the battle-field. I have also been having dreams, Krishna. I am good at reading meanings into dreams. My dreams tell me clearly that the Pandavas are going to win this

war. I saw Yudhishthira eating sweetmeat payasa from a golden bowl. I saw Bheema standing on a mountain top glaring at the world spread out in front of him like a cloth. I saw you and Arjuna glowing with an unearthly glow. I saw Nakula, Sahadeva and Satyaki dressed in beautiful white silks with garlands and jewels on their necks and arms, looking at me with smiling faces. I saw all of us on the side of Duryodhana travelling towards the south. I know, Krishna, that we are all going to die very soon. I am not worried about that at all. I have been warned enough about this end of mine.

"I know that the end of the sacrifice will be near when you see me killed by Arjuna; when Dussasana lies bleeding on the field, with his blood reddening the lips of Bheema; when Drona and Bheeshma fall on the field of battle killed by the sons of Drupada; when Duryodhana falls down with his thigh broken by Bheema. I know that all this is going to happen. I can see the entire picture before my mind's eye like a picture unfurled in front of me. I am not sorry for myself. On the other hand I am looking forward to the end of the war. I am impatient for the end. I am tired, Krishna, tired of this life. I want to reach heaven. Because heaven holds all for which I sigh. I will meet you in heaven, my lord. There, I will meet my brothers too and my father and my mother. It will indeed, be heaven. But now we must part".

Krishna embraced the great Radheya and wrung his hand lovingly. Radheya brushed away his tears and smiled a sad smile. Together they walked back to the chariot.

CHAPTER 17

KRISHNA RETURNS TO UPAPLAVYA

Krishna reached Upaplavya. He spent a few moments with the Pandavas and then went to his own apartments. He had to rest for a few hours. When the sun had set he went to the Pandavas. Everyone was waiting for his report about the happenings at Hastinapura. Yudhishthira, after honouring him and making him comfortable said: "Krishna, we are waiting to hear about the happenings at the court of Dhritarashtra. From the expression on your face I can guess it. But I want you to tell us all the details of your embassy".

Krishna said: "I was at the court of Dhritarashtra. I tried so hard to persuade Duryodhana to be sensible. But all my attempts were

futile. Yudhishthira, I have come back without achieving what I hoped to achieve. I am sorry. Your dream and mine have not been realized. You will have to fight, Yudhishthira. Please justify your name. It is necessary to be *firm*, now that war has become inevitable". Yudhishthira's face was downcast. A look of pain and despair crossed his face. A moment later he said: "Tell me everything, Krishna, everything".

Krishna said: "Listen to me, all of you. I was taken to the great council hall. I saw all the Kuru elders waiting to hear me. I saw the sages Narada and all the others waiting to hear me speak". He told them everything that happened in the court of Dhritarashtra. He told them the words spoken by Dhritarashtra, Bheeshma and Drona and Vidura. He told them about his pleading with the king first and then with Duryodhana. He told them about the anger of Duryodhana and his exit from the court, He told them about the coming of Gandhari and her pleading with her son. He told them about the attempt to capture him, and his Viswaroopa. The kings were silently listening to the recital. When they heard about the attempt of Duryodhana to capture Krishna, they were furious. The eyes of Yudhishthira were crimson with wrath. He said: "Did that man dare to do that to my lord? There is no hope for him. I have made up my mind. I am firm. My days of forgiveness are over. I have decided on war. It is not necessary to hear anything more. I am going to fight. It will be a war which has not been equalled so far by any other war. Krishna, the earth, you once said, is thirsty for the blood of these sinners—nay, these terrible beasts. I cannot wait. Let us begin the war at once, immediately, at this instant. I cannot wait a moment more". Bheema was thrilled to hear the words of his dear brother. He rushed to Yudhishthira and embraced him wildly. He threw his mace up into the air and shouted: "WAR! WAR! Nothing can prevent the war anymore. No one can save the sons of the old king from my fury. Arjuna, the blood of Radheya will be reddening the sands of Kurukshetra very soon! Sahadeva, I will see you kill that hated Sakuni! Krishna, I feel as though I have drunk the wine of the gods! I am so happy!" Krishna smiled at the excitement of Bheema. He said: "I left for Upaplavya. Duryodhana has already ordered his troops to proceed to wards Kurukshetra. When man is prodded by the whip of fate, he hurries to his death as fast as he can. Duryodhana is planning to ask the great war veteran Bheeshma to be his commander-in-chief. I am sure you will have to fight the Kuru hero first. He is too well known to you. I do not have to tell you what a strong opponent we have even at the beginning. Bheeshma has defeated his guru, Bhargava him-

self, in the days of yore. Sikhandi and Arjuna, prepare yourselves. War is on!"

Yudhishthira got up and addressed all the kings who had come to help him. He said: "You have all heard the words of my lord. You have all seen my attempts at peace. I did not want this war. But it has been thrust upon me. I ask of you all to give me your help and steer me through the difficult days that are ahead of me. Krishna, you have at your disposal these seven Akshauhinis. Drupada, Virata, Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, Sikhandi, Chekitana and Bheema are all great warriors who can take charge of this army. You must assign to them their duties. One of them will have to be chosen as the commander. Sahadeva, you are the wisest of us. First, I want your opinion as to who should be chosen as the commander of our army".

Sahadeva said: "My lord, they are all fit to be commanders. Each is powerful. But in my opinion Virata, the lord of the Matsyas, seems to be best fitted for the position of commander. He can face the army led by Bheeshma. He is a veteran soldier. I think he is the most fitted". Yudhishthira turned to Nakula and asked for his views. Nakula said: "I feel that the most suitable person is our Drupada, the king of the Panchalas. He has learnt archery from the great Angirasa. He has always been vying with our acharya Drona. He has performed terrible penances. He is a great fighter. There is no doubt that he will be able to withstand the Kaurava army led by Bheeshma. Yes, Drupada is the best". After listening to his two young brothers Yudhishthira turned his eyes towards Arjuna. Arjuna said: "My lord, let Dhrishtadyumna be our commander. This powerful son of Drupada, born of fire, with his unbreakable armour and his terrible bow, this man with a voice like the roar of a lion, this Dhrishtadyumna, will be the most powerful opponent of Bheeshma". At a look from Yudhishthira Bheema stood up and said: "In my opinion Sikhandi is the best suited. He has no equal. He is the most powerful fighter on our side. He has decided to be the death of our grandfather. He can easily defy Bhargava himself". After these words of his brothers Yudhishthira said: "I am of opinion that Krishna is the best suited for the role of commander. He may not have weapons: he may have weapons. That is not of any importance. He is younger than many of us. But he is the wisest. Our welfare is in his hands. It is but right that our army should be led by him. The night is fast slipping by. Let us come to a decision and try to get some sleep. Tomorrow will be a busy day for all of us. Come, let us decide. I am waiting for Krishna to give his opinion. I will do what he says".

Krishna said: "As Sahadeva says, they are all efficient in the art of fighting. It is difficult, almost impossible to come to a decision.

They can fight with the army of Indra. Why then should we worry about this army of the Kauravas? After pondering on the suggestions of your brothers I feel that the suggestion of Arjuna is the best. I consider that Dhrishtadyumna, the son of Drupada, is the best man to command your army". Yudhishthira was pleased with the words of Krishna.

He announced to the army that Dhrishtadyumna was chosen to be their commander. Cheers rang from all the four quarters. They liked to be led by this lion among men. The seven Akshauhinis were divided up amongst the heroes, Bheema, Nakula, Sahadeva, Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, the sons of Draupadi and Abhimanyu.

Early in the morning, after performing the sacred rites, Yudhishthira set out to the army camp to arrange about their future course of action. The heroes who had assembled were many. The Kekaya brothers, Dhrishtaketu, Sreniman, Vasudhana, Virata, Sikhandi, Drupada, Sudharma, Kunti Bhoja, Dhrishtadyumna, Anadrishti, Chekitana, Satyaki, the Pandavas and their sons, Abhimanyu and Krishna.

They reached the great field called Kurukshetra. They blew their conchs. The army was excited at the sound of so many conchs which were blown all together and one by one. It was a thrilling moment. The king went round the place and ordered the tents to be erected. Dhrishtadyumna took charge of the entire arrangements. He had the place measured and made provisions for tents for all the heroes who had come to fight. Krishna and his cousin Satyaki made arrangements for a moat to be dug all around their camp. There were tents for each and every one of the kings. Chariots and weapons numbering up to millions had been placed there in a common place for the use of everyone. Each one of the chariots was equipped with a hundred bows and thousands of arrows. Armours and finger guards were placed everywhere for use. The Pandavas had now only to wait for the war to begin. All the preparations were going on at furious speed. They had been ready for this long ago. But the return of Krishna precipitated their decision.

Chapter 18

BHEESHMA--THE COMMANDER OF THE KAURAVA ARMY

As soon as Krishna left the court, Duryodhana told his friends and his brothers: "Krishna is returning to Yudhishthira without being able

to achieve what he came for. He is very angry with me. He is sure to incite the Pandavas to fight against me. Bheema and Arjuna are already eager for war. Yudhishthira will listen to the words of Krishna and of course Bheema and Arjuna. They have been ill-treated by me for the last so many years. They now have with them Virata and Drupada. They are friends with the Pandavas for two reasons. They are related to them and they have also been harassed by me in the past. They will all be looking forward to this war. Dussasana, Radheya, please hurry and make all preparations for war immediately. Please let it be announced to the troops that they are to march out of Hastinapura tomorrow".

The next morning the Kaurava army began its march towards Kurukshetra. The long night was over. Early in the morning Duryodhana went to inspect the army. He had so many friends who had come to his side, to die for him. There were Kripa, Drona, Salya, Jayadratha, Sudakshina, Kritavarma, Aswatthama, Radheya, Bhoorisravas, Sakuni, Bahlika and Somadatta. These were the heroes who had been appointed to lead each Akshauhini. It was a magnificent array.

In the midst of the kings who had assembled, Duryodhana approached Bheeshma. He went and stood before him with his palms folded, after saluting him. He said: "Look, my lord, on this army wending its way to Kurukshetra, like a huge line of ants! This army needs a capable commander. How can I ever dream of another commander when I have you to fight for me? You must guide this entire army. I depend on you to see us through this great war. I fall at your feet in all humility. If you become the commander of my army I have nothing to fear. Please accept the commandership". Bheeshma looked at him and at all the kings who were waiting for his words. He said: "My child, I am quite willing to do as you wish. But I must tell you this. The Pandavas are as dear to me as you are. I will not try to kill the sons of Pandu. I will, however, fight to the best of my ability. I will destroy the Pandava army at the rate of ten thousand a day. There is no one to equal me in this entire world except Arjuna. He is far superior to me. He is the one man who can defeat me or kill me. There is also another condition of mine which you have to fulfil if you want me to command your army. I will fight or your Radheya must fight. He and I do not get on with each other. I am sorry to say it. But I want to avoid further unpleasantness".

Duryodhana did not know what to do or what to say. It was not the court where he could get offended and walk away. He had to be silent. Neither could he bear the insult offered to his dearest friend. He stood silent. Radheya saved the situation for him. He smiled at his dear friend. He said: "Duryodhana, please do not be upset. I

am not offended. Not in the least. On the other hand, I am very happy. I promise you, I will not fight as long as this Bheeshma is alive. When he is killed I will enter the battle-field and fight for you. I will have the pleasure of killing Arjuna since your grandfather has decided not to kill, rather not to hurt, any of the Pandavas". Bheeshma was given the coronation bath and, in the midst of great celebrations, he was crowned the commander of the Kaurava army. The army began its march towards Kurukshetra.

Chapter 19

RADHEYA AND KUNTI—I

The day after Krishna left for Upaplavya after his unsuccessful attempt for peace, Vidura was talking about the happenings in the court, with Kunti. He was very unhappy. He said: "I am so sorry about this foolish obstinacy of Duryodhana. Poor Yudhishthira wants to make peace with him. But Duryodhana refuses. Yudhishthira has a powerful army now. There is no doubt that he is going to win this war. We have tried again and again to convince Duryodhana that he is wrong: that it is stupid to persist in this enmity. But he listens to the advice of Sakuni and Dussasana and Radheya. I am so upset at the thought of this destruction that I have not been able to sleep for the last so many nights". Kunti listened in silence.

Kunti could not push the thoughts of the war away from her mind. She knew that her sons were powerful. But she was afraid of the Kaurava army. She was afraid since Bheeshma had been chosen as the commander of the army. The other source of worry was her son Radheya. The hatred of Duryodhana for the Pandavas was not so terrible as the hatred Radheya had for Arjuna. She told herself: "I think I will go to Radheya and tell him about his birth. I will tell him that he is the brother of the Pandavas. I will try to win him over to the side of Yudhishthira. I will ask a boon of him as I am his mother. He is a noble man. Knowing that I am his mother he will not be able to refuse me anything". Deciding on the course of action, Kunti went alone to the banks of the Ganga. She knew that Radheya would be there worshipping the sun during mid-day. She saw Radheya with his arms uplifted, with his eyes closed, with his face turned towards the sun. She stood behind him. The sun's rays were

too hot. She protected herself with the upper cloth of her son. So she waited until he finished his worship.

His meditation was over. He turned round and found a strange woman taking shelter under his upper cloth. She looked like a wilted wreath of lotus blossoms. He was very much concerned over her. He made her sit down in the shade. He saluted her. He said: "I am Radheya, the son of Atiratha. What can I do for you? You seem to be a lady who is unused to hardships. Please tell me what you want. I usually grant boons to those who come to me at this time of the day. Let me know what I should do".

Kunti looked at him again and again. After that day when she took a long look at him before placing him in the wooden box she saw him closely only today. Her eyes were full of tears. Her dress was wet with her salt tears. Still she looked and still he waited for her to speak. Finally she spoke. She said: "You may know me or you may not. I have come to you to ask a boon of you". Radheya looked at her for a long moment and said: "I do not know you. But I feel that I know you. I feel as though I have known you all my life. Your form, your tears, your sad voice, they all seem to me to be very familiar. But, for the life of me, I cannot say when I have seen you. I am trying to remember". His brows were knit with puzzled thinking. She waited for him to speak. Suddenly he shouted: "I have it! You are the woman of my dreams. I know you". Kunti smiled gently at him and said: "What are you saying? I do not understand! Will you tell me what you mean by this 'dream woman'? I will sit and listen. I am not in a hurry. I have come to spend some time with you".

Radheya's eyes took on a reminiscent look. He said: "It is very strange. I have never told anyone about this dream woman except to my mother Radha. Still, looking at you I want to tell you all about myself. I feel that you will love me and understand me and my heart. I will tell you everything. You may know about it or you may not. My name is Radheya. My mother's name is Radha. But then, she is not my mother. She did not give birth to me. My father Atiratha found me floating on the river Ganga. It was this same river who bore me to my parents. My father took me to his wife Radha and made a gift of me to her. That is why I am called Radheya. My real mother, I am sorry to say, abandoned me at birth. So I have always been Radheya. But I am wandering. Whenever I went to sleep I used to be disturbed by a dream. It would always be the same dream. I would see a woman. She would be dressed in costly robes. She would be dressed like a princess. Her face would always be hidden by a veil. I would be lying down and she would bend over me. Hot tears from her eyes would burn me. I would get up and ask her: 'Who

are you? Why do you weep over me like this?' In a voice choked with tears she would say: 'I cry because of the injustice I have done you. I long for you: but you can never, never be mine. That is why I am weeping. I can talk to you only in my dreams: only in your dreams and mine. That is the only way in which I can still the beating of my heart'. She would try to go away. I would pursue her. I would try to raise her veil. I would cry out to her: 'Who are you? Show your face to me. I want to see you. Do not go away without answering my question. Who are you?' But this woman of my dreams would vanish like a startled ghost. That is my dream woman.

"As years passed, the dream woman would haunt me only once in a while. She did not appear to me so often or so vividly. Gradually she stopped visiting me in my dreams. She left my dreams long ago, this woman. I think it was my mother who came to me in my dreams. In the beginning she was thinking of me very often. As days passed by the thoughts of me grew less and finally, when she had other children, she did not think of me, or want to think of me. That is how I have explained these strange dreams. But you look very much like this dream mother of mine. Who are you? What do you want?"

Kunti's head was bowed down. She could not look at this son who could never be her son. She did not know how to tell him who she was. She pondered for a while and said: "You are right. I am your dream woman. I am your mother". She paused. But before Radheya could speak a word she continued: "I am Kunti, the mother of the five Pandavas. You are my first-born". Radheya said: "Kunti Devi, the mother of the great Pandavas has come to her son Radheya to ask a boon of him! Am I awake? Or am I asleep? Perhaps I am dreaming again and my dream woman has come to me again!" He looked at her and she at him. A moment, and they were in each other's arms. Kunti's tears drenched Radheya. He looked at her and said: "After all, you have come. If you only knew how much I have longed for this moment! If you only knew how often I have dreamed of this moment! If you only knew how often I have lived this moment in my mind! I have thought of you more often than you have thought of me. I have longed for a look beyond that veil of yours which would so intrigue me. Mother! My mother! The mother who brought me into this world! The mother who first made me see my beloved lord, the sun! Mother, why did you stay away from me so long? Why did you make me unhappy all these years? After all, I did not ask much. I just wanted to see you. But you have come now. You have dared to accept me as your son".

Kunti turned startled eyes on Radheya. He smiled and said: "Yes, mother, I know who I am. I know that I was born of you and the sun.

I know that you were afraid to keep me and so you threw me into the river". Kunti was amazed. "But I did not dream that you knew! How did you know? When did you know? Knowing this, why did you not come to me? Why did you wait for me to come to you?" Radheya looked at her intently and said: "Mother, I knew it yesterday. Krishna told me the story of my life. But let us not talk about all that now. Come, mother, let us sit down and just be with each other. This happiness will not last long. Let me drain the cup of joy to the last drop. I am happy since I have my mother by my side. Let me place my head on your lap. Let me be like this for some time. Please do not disturb this blissful moment by words. Words, mother, spell pain. I want to be silent". He placed his head on her lap and closed his eyes. So they sat: for several moments perhaps: or several hours perhaps. She had found her long-lost son and he had found his mother. It was a sacred moment. For those few moments they were very happy.

CHAPTER 20

RADHEYA AND KUNTI—II

Suddenly Radheya got up and said: "I thank you for this kindness, mother. I have been so happy for the last few moments or hours: I do not know how long. But now I have got to get up from this sleep of peace. Tell me, why have you come to me? What is the boon that you wanted to ask of me? Radheya waits for your command".

Kunti looked at him and said: "Not Radheya any more! Please do not call yourself Radheya when I am here! You are Kaunteya, the first son of Kunti. I am proud to call you my son. I now have six sons and not five. I am very happy". Radheya looked at her with his eyes full of tears. He said: "Mother, O, mother, why did you have to come to me now and tell me this? Can you not see that I am just longing to be called by the name Kaunteya? I am the son of Kunti and Surya and I will be proud to be known by the name Kaunteya. I am proud of my parents and yet I will have to remain Radheya till I am dead. Mother, can you not see how unhappy I am? But it is no matter. Let me talk about the present. You wanted to ask a boon of me. Tell me what it is. If it is within my power to grant it to you, if it does not go against my good name in this world, I will be happy to have the privilege of granting a boon to my mother".

Kunti was silent for a long time. She brushed the tears away

from her eyes and said: "My child, you have been suffering many indignities all these years. That was because the world did not know that you are the son of Surya and Kunti. Your dark days are now over. Without knowing that they are your brothers you have been hating the Pandavas as Duryodhana is doing. But now you know who you are. It is not right that you should fight with your brothers. You must come with me. I will take you to the Pandavas. You will be king of the world and your brothers will worship you. You can find happiness and peace in the company of Yudhishthira. You must not be with Duryodhana any more. Come with me and gladden my heart. This is the boon I ask of you".

Radheya's eyes were bright with unshed tears. He looked at Kunti and said: "Within two days two noble people have offered me the world. They have come to me, tempting me with the assurance that the noble Yudhishthira will do service to me! Fate's ways, indeed, are strange! I have no time to think of all that now. Tell me, my dearest mother, what will happen if I come with you now?" "Why!" said Kunti, "you will be united with Arjuna whom you have been hating all these years. The Pandavas will win this entire world from Duryodhana and you will rule it since you are the eldest Pandava. Let the Kauravas see this great meeting between Arjuna and his long-lost brother. You will both be like Balarama and Krishna. If you are united who can defy you? You will be lord of this world. You will no longer be a sutaputra".

Radheya heard a voice from the heavens. It was the voice of his father, Surya. He said: "Listen to your mother, my son. It is for your good. Do as she says and live long. I beseech you, do as she says". Radheya heard all this and yet he stood unmoved. He looked long and steadily at his mother. Finally he spoke: "Mother, if you only knew how angry I have been with you all these years! I have nursed this anger against my unknown mother who did me so much injustice the moment I was born. Because of this injustice, my name, my reputation, my life, my everything was blighted. I had been wanting to ask you a thousand questions and pour out all my bitterness. But now, looking at you, all my anger is gone: vanished, like snow on the face of the desert. Mother, my heart is full of only an infinite sadness. It is now full of longing for your love and for your gentle voice. I have loved my mother Radha as I have loved no one else. But even that love threatens to become dim in front of this new love which overwhelms me. My heart is flooded with love for my brothers whom I did not know till now. Mother, can a mother's love be so wonderful as all that? My heart is ready to burst with the raging love

that is born newly in my mind". Kunti and Radheya embraced each other again and again and the sun smiled down on this meeting between mother and son.

CHAPTER 21

RADHEYA AND KUNTI—III

Kunti said: "Come, my son. Come with me and be united with your brothers. Come". Radheya was sobbing with anguish. He said: "No, mother, I cannot come. I must not come". Kunti was surprised at the tone of Radheya's words. She said: "Why do you say that, my child? Surely, now that you know that the Pandavas are your brothers, you do not mean to stay with Duryodhana?"

Radheya said: "Yes, mother. I will stay by the side of Duryodhana. You see, he has been my friend all these years. All these years, mother, when you had no thought for your son whom you abandoned in the river, Duryodhana has been my only friend. The stigma, sutaputra, has clung to me for ever. No one would treat me with affection or respect since I was a sutaputra. I was all alone in this world, dogged by the name Radheya the sutaputra. My birth has been my undoing. Wherever I went, my name preceded me and I was not welcomed in any place. Drona would not teach me archery since I was a sutaputra. I went to Bhargava and he taught me archery. But that was because I told him that I was a brahmin. When he came to know that I was a sutaputra he cursed me. Hurt by all this I went to Hastinapura. It was the day of the tournament". Radheya looked at Kunti. He saw her form trembling with agitation as though she remembered something painful. Fresh tears flowed from her eyes. Radheya said: "Mother, did you not recognize me then? On the day of the tournament when I entered the arena, you must have seen me. You must have recognized me. There is no mother who cannot recognize her son. I then had the Kavacha and the Kundalas. You must have recognized me then. But for reasons known to yourself you did not tell anyone about me. I will not ask you why. I have found you after all these years and I will not let my words wound you. I love you, my mother, and I am grateful to you for telling me that you love me. But I am straying from what I was saying. On the day of the tournament, when Bheema and Arjuna were insulting me since I was a sutaputra, Duryodhana came to my rescue. He claimed me as his friend and he made

me King of Anga. He wanted just my heart in return for what he did to me and my heart has been in his keeping ever since. I have once promised him that I would do anything for him: even if it is the most impossible task. I have loved Duryodhana and he has loved me as no one else has done so far.

"Mother, if you could only look into my heart you can see what a dreadful tumult is raging there. I never thought that I would find any love other than my beloved friend Duryodhana. But today, my heart is aching to go to Yudhishthira and claim him as my brother. This Arjuna whom I have been hating all these years, this my bitter enemy, now appears in my mind's eye as a dear loving child holding out its hands to me in affection. Mother, my heart is bursting with affection for my new-found brothers and my long-lost mother. I would give anything to be with you all. But it cannot be".

Kunti looked at his face grim with pain. Her tears choked her. She said: "Why do you say that it cannot be? I have always loved you. Whenever Arjuna spoke of you as Radheya the sutaputra, my heart would burst with unhappiness and pain because of the injustice I had done to you. But now, I do not care what people say. I am now bold enough to face the sneering eyes of the world. My heart has been empty all these years though I am the mother of five sons, five heroes. Come with me and fill up this void".

Radheya took her face in his hands and wiped her tears. He said: "Mother, I cannot come. I owe something to Duryodhana. It is a debt of love and gratitude. It is a hard debt to pay. I knew it but I never dreamed that it would be so difficult. I am bound to him by a thousand bonds. I cannot forget my duty because of this visit of my mother. I have been highly jealous of my honour. I have cared for just one thing in this world and that is a good name. I will lose that if I forsake my friend now. I love Duryodhana and he loves me. Depending on me and my hatred for Arjuna, my friend has launched this great war. I am now known the world over as Radheya the sutaputra, the greatest friend of the king. This is the one good name I have carved out for myself, and I cannot afford to lose that. I will have to forget this visit of yours. I never did have a brother. My brother is Duryodhana. He is the one man who has shared his everything with me. He has been to me more than a brother. We have shared the same seat always and we have always been together. He hopes to share the throne with me. He has centred all his hopes on me. I cannot shatter his dreams for the sake of a ghost of the past which tugs at the strings of my heart. My heart is not mine to give you; it belongs to the king, my master, my friend, Duryodhana.

"Mother, I know that the end has come. Duryodhana and all

those who love him are doomed. And I am doomed. Nothing will happen to the Pandavas. Krishna has taken up the cause of the Pandavas. They are as safe as a child in its mother's womb. You and Krishna have, between you, ruined my firmness and I know that I will lose to Arjuna in the battle. Arjuna will be the successful man.

"You must have heard about my life. I learnt archery from Bhagavan Bhargava himself. But he cursed me. He said that when I am fighting with my dearest enemy I will forget the holy incantations. On top of that there is another curse. A brahmin has cursed me that the wheel of my chariot will become caught in the mire at the crucial moment: that I will be killed when I am least prepared for it. Indra came and took away from me the Kavacha and the Kundalas which were placed on me by my father. They would have guarded me from death. But I have lost them too. And now, you and Krishna have robbed me of my inner armour. I hated Arjuna. I would have killed him happily. But I cannot do it now. My mind is full of love for Arjuna. How can I be true to my promise?"

Radheya covered his face with his two hands and sobbed as if his heart would break. Kunti could do nothing except weep with him. She took his head on her lap and she stroked his head with loving hands. So they sat for a while. Radheya sat up and said: "Mother, it is not good for me, this your crying. A mother should not weep over her child: not when he is alive. Mother, please bless me and make that dream of mine come true. A son needs the loving blessing of his mother, if he is to reach the heavens. Say that my name will live as long as the world of men lives". He fell at her feet. Kunti, with tears in her eyes, blessed him.

Radheya said: "It has always been my rule to grant boons to those who come to me during the worship of my father. You came to me today and asked me for a boon. I could not grant that boon. But mother, you must not go away empty-handed. I will grant you a boon on my own accord. I promise to spare your sons—nay, my brothers. I will not kill them. Yudhishthira, Bheema, Nakula and Sahadeva will not die at my hands. But, Arjuna—NO, I must fight with Arjuna. I cannot abandon my promise to the king. This duel of mine with Arjuna has got to be fought. Two things are possible. I may be able to kill him. Or I may meet my death at his hands. Either way, my fame will be immortal. I will die a noble death. Mother, do not grieve. Either way, you will have five sons. You will have Radheya and no Arjuna or you will have Arjuna and no Radheya. You will still be the mother of five sons. Go back home, my beloved mother".

Kunti's frame was racked by her sobs. She had found her son

and lost him too. Her heart which had been empty was still more empty after this. Like lightning which leaves the world still darker, these few moments with her noble son made her life even more desolate. Radheya sensed her unhappiness. He embraced her and said: "Mother, what has been written by the gods cannot be changed. Not your tears nor my prayers can alter the writings of the Creator. These things have been determined long ago: long before you or I were born. Do not try to change the course of destiny. Pray for me. Pray that I may reach the heavens meant for heroes. Please wash my unhappiness with your tears. I feel that I have been given my coronation bath. Your tears are more holy and more precious than the waters of Ganga. Mother, it is getting late. You must go before anyone knows that you and I have met. Let this be just another dream".

Radheya had to lift her to her feet. She was so weak with anguish. Mother and son were held together in a close embrace. Kunti held him close and embraced him again and again as though she would never let him go. Suddenly she released him and walked away with slow hesitant steps. Radheya stood there, rooted to the spot, long after she had vanished out of his sight.

Chapter 22

BALARAMA AND RUKMI

The Pandavas had heard about the coronation of Bheeshma as the commander of the Kaurava army. Yudhishthira made Drupada, Virata, Satyaki, Dhrishtadyumna, Dhrishtaketu, Sikhandi and Sahadeva the commanders of the seven Akshauhinis and Dhrishtadyumna was crowned as the commander of the entire army. Arjuna was made the chief fighter. Krishna became the charioteer of Arjuna.

Balarama, the brother of Krishna, came to Yudhishthira. He was accompanied by many members of the Vrishni clan. Yudhishthira received him with great excitement and honoured him. Bheema fell at his feet and stood by his side with his palms folded. All the Pandavas and Krishna stood by his side. Balarama blessed them. Yudhishthira placed his hand in that of Balarama and led him to a costly seat. Everyone came to see the great Balarama who was reputed to be more powerful than even Krishna. Balarama looked at all of them and at Krishna in particular. He said: "I heard that a great war is to be fought. There is going to be a wholesale slaughter of all the kings of

this world. I hope to see you all crossing the sea of danger safely and without any harm done to any of you. It is evident that the war could not be averted. This brother of mine, this Krishna, has been told again and again by me: 'Please behave with the same impartiality towards both the parties. They are both related to us. Like the Pandavas, Duryodhana also is dear to us and near to us.' I asked him not to side with anyone. But he has refused to listen to my words. Yudhishthira, for the sake of you and your brothers, he has decided to take part in this war. Arjuna, he has agreed to be charioteer to you. I know now that victory is yours. When Krishna takes up the reins of the white horses of Arjuna, no one else can dream of winning. Bheema, you are dear to me. But Duryodhana, as you know, has been my favourite pupil. I love him as this brother of mine loves Arjuna. But I will not side with Duryodhana. I cannot live without Krishna. I cannot join the side opposite to that of my brother. I do not believe in fighting with my brother for the sake of some war between distant cousins of ours. I leave the war and the future of the world in the hands of Krishna. As for me, I cannot bear to see the destruction of the Kuru House. I am going far away from here to the banks of the river Saraswati. I wish you well. You have my blessings". The great Balarama, with his eyes reddened with wine, walked away like a lion walking to its den. He took leave of Krishna very tenderly and went away.

There came to Yudhishthira another great fighter. This was Rukmi, the king of Bhojakata. He was the brother of Rukmini, wife of Krishna. He had brought with him an army which totalled up to one Akshauhini. Yudhishthira, as was his custom, received him cordially and made him sit down. Rukmi said: "Arjuna, do not be afraid of the army of the Kauravas. I will help you to win this war. There is no one as great as Rukmi. I will do anything you ask me to, in the war. I want to be of assistance to you. I can defeat all the heroes on the opposite side. You do not need all these kings here to help you. I am able to kill the Kaurava heroes single-handed. Having killed all of them, I will give you this world as my gift". Rukmi looked at everyone and smiled to himself. Arjuna watched the expression on the face of Yudhishthira and then he looked at Krishna. It was known to everyone how Rukmi was defeated by Krishna when Rukmini was being carried away by Krishna. These two were sworn enemies. But Krishna's face was bland. He spoke nothing and his face showed nothing. Arjuna said: "Listen to me, Rukmi. Please do not come here and talk to me about fear. Who is afraid here, that you should come and say 'Do not be afraid'? I do not like your tone. These heroes who have assembled here are all brave warriors. Not

one of them has used such words to us. We have never been afraid. Without the help of anyone I have managed to win several wars. You need not adopt this patronising tone and say that you will win the world for us and make a gift of it to us. I do not need your help. You may go or you may stay. We are not anxious to have you".

Rukmi went away with his army. He went to Duryodhana and he spoke similar words to him. He told him how he had been treated by the Pandavas. That proud monarch refused the help of this braggart. In the great war that was fought on Kurukshetra all the kings of the world fought, except Balarama and Rukmi.

The river Hiranwati became the line of demarcation between the camps of the two armies. The Pandava army was stationed on the banks of the river. Duryodhana called for his associates. He summoned Uluka, the son of Sakuni, and told him: "Go at once to the Pandava camp. Go to the presence of Yudhishthira. Make sure that all the five brothers are there with Krishna. Make sure that all the heroes who have come to their help are also there. Then, in the midst of everyone, speak these words of mine. 'The war which we have both been thinking about for so many days, has now become a fact. You sent a message full of bragging through Sanjaya. The time has come when you will have to fufil your oaths: when you will have to prove your words. In the court of the king of Hastinapura, fourteen years back, all of you took several oaths. The time has come when you will have to fulfil them'. Uluka, these words will have to be spoken to the Pandavas. I will give you individual messages for the brothers and Krishna. Go now and bring me back their answer" Duryodhana gave him the individual messages also and sent Uluka to the banks of the Hiranwati.

CHAPTER 23

ULUKA IN THE PANDAVA CAMP

Uluka reached the Pandava camp. He spoke to Yudhishthira: "I have been sent by Duryodhana with messages for all of you. I will deliver them. But first, you must assure me that you will not be angry with me". Yudhishthira said: "Please do not be afraid. We will not hurt you". Uluka then spoke the words of the Kaurava monarch. "Yudhishthira, you were our slave because of the game of dice. We dragged your dear wife to our court. Which man who is

a real man would have allowed his wife to be insulted as she was insulted? You are not brave enough to defy us. Yet you talk as though you are great. You spent twelve years in the forest. One year you spent in the court of Virata, doing menial service to that man. Remember all the things that have happened to you so far. Remember the state of Draupadi on that day in our court. Throw off this hypocrisy of yours. You are trying to hide your cowardice by a cloak of Dharma. Remember the past and be a man. Fight with us as a true kshatriya.

"Bheema, you swore on impulse that you would drink the blood of Dussasana. Drink it if you can! You are very good at cooking. But remember, wielding the cooking ladle and wielding the mace are two entirely different things. You may be good at carving meat meant for eating. But let me see how well you are going to carve my brother's heart!

"Arjuna, you have been bragging about how you are going to kill my Radheya. Let me see you do it. You are not even a man. You spent the last year of your exile in the palace of Virata, dancing and singing. You are not a man. How can you even think of fighting with Radheya?

"Nakula, Sahadeva, you delightful little twins, the darlings of your mother, you are fit to be just what you were in the court of Virata. You can do nothing better than tending cows and horses. You have sworn to kill my uncle and his son. It makes me laugh to imagine you do it!

"Yudhishthira, please do not think lightly of me and my army. You are all of you going to be killed. Prepare your souls now, to meet your Maker.

"Krishna, do not think that we were impressed with the conjuring trick which you practised in our court. We did not like it. You spoke very brave words that day. You said that with the help of Bheema and Arjuna you would destroy the entire world. Let me see you try! Destroy the world indeed! Krishna, it is not Vrindavana where you won the hearts of the gopis with your pipe and your dancing. We are all men. We are not impressed by your fame which has spread to all the four quarters. Fight with us if you are a man. I am waiting for the beginning of the war. I want to see how brave you can all be, you who talked so much about killing all of us".

The Pandavas looked like fire kindled newly. They got up from their seats angrily. They were so furious they did not know what to do or what to say. Bheema glared at Uluka and it looked as though he was going to kill him. Krishna looked at Bheema and smiled as if to say: "Leave him alone. He is a messenger. He has been told

that he will not be harmed Do not break the word of your brother". Krishna spoke to Uluka. He said: "You can hurry back to Duryodhana. Tell him this.

"Duryodhana, your words have been heard by all of us. We have understood every word of it. We are all willing to do what you want us to do. This is now my personal message to you. 'You evil man, be a man at least from today. You have not lived like a man. I am hoping that you will at least die like a man. You are thinking that Krishna is not going to fight. And so, because I am the charioteer to Arjuna and not a fighter, you are not afraid of me. If I want to, I can burn the entire host of kings and heroes like a forest fire burning straw. But I have too much respect for our king Yudhishthira and because he has asked me, I have taken up the work of a charioteer. You can thank Yudhishthira for the fact that I am not fighting in this war. But remember, Duryodhana, that though I may be just a charioteer you will see how I am going to steer the horses of my Arjuna's chariot. Wherever you look, you will see the chariot of Arjuna with its ape banner. It will strike terror into your heart. It will rob you of your sleep. Waking or sleeping, you will see me and Arjuna and nothing else. You will see with your own eyes Bheema drinking the blood of your beloved brother. You will be standing helpless and you will have to see your brother's desperate eyes. He will not be dead yet when you see him caught in the arms of Bheema. We will do everything which we promised to do. *You* are a breaker of promises but not the Pandavas. Remember that'."

Bheema said: "Uluka, go and tell your king that Bheema has not forgotten his promise. Ask your king to prepare himself to see the death of all his brothers. He will see the death of all his sons and all his nephews. He will then remember this message of his to the Pandavas. I will drink the blood of Dussasana under the eyes of Duryodhana who will not be able to save his brother. Let this king of yours hide himself in any place, I will follow him. I will break his thigh and kill him. The brave do not repeat their oaths to assure themselves. They do what they have sworn to do. Tell him that".

Arjuna said: "Your king is a man of the worst type. He has no bravery of his own. He depends on the strength and courage of others. He has installed the grand old man Bheeshma as the commander of his army. Is he not ashamed of himself? How dare he harass that old man at this age? He has decided that the great Kaurava, Bheeshma, should die first. He has to die. I am going to kill him. I will show this king of yours that we are not men of words but men of action. Let him see the great heroes fall one by one. He will then remember

his message to the Pandavas conveyed by you". Receiving all their replies Uluka returned to his king.

The next day the army of Duryodhana assembled on the field Kurukshetra. The army of Yudhishthira too assembled on Kurukshetra. The night had been a night of great excitement on both sides. Duryodhana was immensely pleased at the thought that Bheeshma would destroy the entire army of the Pandavas. He had no fear of the five brothers. He was sure that the war would be over in a day: that no other commander would be needed for his army. His grandfather would destroy the enemies in a day.

Yudhishthira spent a sleepless night. He was very unhappy. They were all talking together for a long time. Yudhishthira said: "Krishna, I am very unhappy at the thought of the future. I do not like the shape of things to come. I did not want this war. I do not want to fight with our grandfather. I do not like the thought of hurting him with our arrows. I hate this war". Krishna looked at him and said: "It is not right that you should be unhappy at this juncture. It is a critical time. There is no blame attached to your action. You are doing your duty as a kshatriya. When I was in Hastinapura I noticed that only Vidura was openly defying Duryodhana. Bheeshma, Drona and Kripa were not quite averse to war. Bheeshma has willingly undertaken to command the Kaurava army. He is willing to fight with you. Why should you worry?" Yudhishthira said: "Arjuna, it was to avoid this war that I suffered the thirteen years of exile. Bheema, you were for fighting. I asked you to be patient. I am sorry about all that has happened. I tried my best to avoid the war. But the god of destruction has been born in the world. The fourth, the last portion of Time, Kali, is waiting to be born. How are we to kill these elders whom we have been honouring all these years? It is sinful".

Arjuna comforted him with loving words. He said: "I feel it is not a sin to kill those who have decided to kill us. These elders, having known you and your goodness, have taken the side of Duryodhana. We have to fight. There is no going back. This war has been forced on us. We have no option. The mountain river, once it leaves its mountain home, has to go down the valley and proceed towards the sea. Even so, souls that have set out on a pilgrimage to fame have to go on and on. There is no way of return for the river and there is no way of return for us either. Come, brother, let us not think any more. THE WAR IS TO BEGIN TOMORROW. Come, let us sleep".

BHEESHMA PARVA

CHAPTER 1

THE FIELD OF KURUKSHETRA

The Pandava army was stationed on the western side of the field. It was facing the east. Yudhishthira had stationed his army in the neighbourhood of the lake called Samantapanchaka. Early in the morning the Pandavas saw the white umbrella in the heart of the Kaurava camp. It was the insignia of royalty. Seeing that umbrella the hearts of the Pandava warriors thrilled with thoughts of war. Arjuna and Krishna blew their conchs. There were resounding noises from the Kaurava camp. Excitement could be felt everywhere.

The warriors on either side met and set down the rules which had to be followed by both the armies. The fight should be between equals. For instance, a fight should be between two chariots or two archers or two mace-holders. If, during the fight, one should withdraw, he should not be harassed. If the fight is with words, the opponent should reply with words and not with arrows! Anyone who runs away from the field should not be killed. No one who is unprepared or frightened should be attacked. Charioteers, animals and servants who had to blow the war trumpets, drums and cymbals should not be attacked. These were some of the rules of chivalrous fighting which had to be observed. After these rules had been agreed upon, the two armies prepared themselves for the great encounter.

The previous night Vyaasa came to Dhritarashtra, his son. Vyaasa said: "My son, dreadful days have come. Your sons and other kings, all the other kings who have now assembled, will die in a few days. This is the law of fate. There is no use in your feeling sorry for this. If you want to see the war I will grant you your eyes". Poor Dhritarashtra said; "My lord, I have been sightless all my life. I do not know what it is to see. I do not want the use of my eyes to watch my sons die. No. I will be satisfied if I can hear about it from someone. If there is someone to see the war and relate it to me vividly I will be satisfied". Vyaasa said: "So be it. This Sanjaya will give you a true report of the entire war. I will grant him inner sight. He will be like the rishis who can see all that is to be seen. Sanjaya will see everything that happens in the war. He will know even the thoughts of all of them. Whether spoken, or whether it is just in the mind of a man, Sanjaya will know it. Whether in the night or in the day, Sanjaya will see it all. Everyday he will be on the field of battle and see the battle being fought. He will relate it to you during the

night. He will know no fatigue or exhaustion". Vyaasa said that omens were all prophesying the defeat and death of the Kauravas and the success of the Pandavas. He comforted his unhappy son and went away.

THE ACCOUNT OF THE WAR FROM NOW ON IS ALL IN THE WORDS OF SANJAYA AS HE RELATED IT TO DHRITA-RASHTRA.

The king was busy arranging his troops. He spoke to his brother Dussasana: "See that chariots driven by the best of men is placed near our grandfather. The war we have always wanted has now become a reality. The greatest task ahead of us is the protection of Bheeshma. He is capable of destroying the army of the Pandavas which is protected by Dhrishtadyumna. Grandfather has told us, you remember, that he will not fight with Sikhandi since he was once a woman called Amba who changed her sex later. The Pandavas are sure to know this fact and it is very necessary to protect grandfather from Sikhandi. Let all our warriors try their best to kill Sikhandi. Arjuna's chariot is protected by Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas on the left and right. Arjuna is guarding Sikhandi. My dear Dussasana, we must be careful, and prevent danger from coming near our commander. Remember that always".

Ten Akshauhinis of the Kauravas were arranged in a formidable phalanx. The eleventh was under the immediate leadership of Bheeshma who was in the front. Bheeshma's horses were white. His banner was a golden palm tree with five stars. His chariot was of silver. With his white hair and white dress, seated in the silver chariot, Bheeshma looked like the rising moon. The sight of the veteran warrior struck terror into the hearts of the enemies. The sun had just appeared in the east with his rays red with the touch of dawn. Bheeshma addressed his troops: "The gates of heaven have today opened wide to let in all those who are to die. All of you must fight without any thought of the future. A glorious future is in store for all of us. It is not glorious for a kshatriya to die in his bed, to die after an illness. A kshatriya should die only on the battle-field. Prepare yourselves to win or to die". All the kshatriyas were ready to die. Only one man had laid down his arms and that was Radheya. He had taken an oath that he would not fight as long as Bheeshma was alive. The supporters of Bheeshma were led by Aswatthama. He was accompanied by several of the heroes of whom Bhoorisravas was one. Salya was another. Seven warriors were there to guard the great man against the approach of Sikhandi.

Duryodhana could be seen at the centre of the army. His famous

banner was clearly visible: the serpent embroidered on a cloth of gold. Looking at the immense army and its commander, Yudhishthira spoke to Arjuna: "Their army is so huge. It is made up of eleven Akshauhinis and ours is made up of just seven. How are you going to arrange our army against that of Bheeshma? It is indeed formidable". Arjuna said that he would try and arrange the army in the phalanx by name Vajra. This was impenetrable. It was the favourite arrangement of Indra and from him it got its name. Dhrishtadyumna was in the van of the army. His supporter was Bheema. Yudhishthira was at the centre of the phalanx. Sikhandi was in the middle too, supported by Arjuna. Dhrishtadyumna was protected by Bheema. The right side of the army was protected by Satyaki. The Kauravas could now see the chariot of Arjuna. It was a beautiful chariot. The terrible ape banner was to be seen from a great distance. The great Hanuman had taken his place on it. The white horses gleamed in the morning sun. Krishna's smiling face could be seen. His left hand was holding the reins and his right hand held the whip. The sight of the great pair Krishna and Arjuna was thrilling. The commanders of the Kaurava army, Drona and Kripa, saluted them mentally, since they knew that they were looking at Nara and Narayana. Krishna had now brought the chariot to the front of the army. He spoke to Arjuna. He said: "Arjuna, be firm now. Look on this Bheeshma. He is the lion among the Kaurava heroes. This great hero, this war veteran will be your first victim. Prepare yourself, Arjuna, for the great war".

Chapter 2

YUDHISHTHIRA'S CHIVALRY

A sudden silence fell on the entire army. It looked like a painted picture. The Kuru veteran on the one side with all the heroes surrounding him: the great Dhrishtadyumna and Bheema with all the other warriors on the side of the Pandavas: Krishna and Arjuna in the golden chariot drawn by the snow-white steeds. In the silence, an amazing thing happened. Yudhishthira suddenly removed his armour. He dropped all his weapons to the ground. He walked with bare feet towards the enemy camp. Everyone was watching him with bated breath. He was walking towards his dear grandfather. Looking at him, Bheema followed him. Arjuna and Sahadeva with Nakula and Krishna walked with him. No one could understand why Yudhishthira was

doing it. Arjuna said: "My lord, what is the reason behind this sudden decision of yours to go towards your enemies?" Bheema said: "My lord, you have removed your armour and so have we. You have dropped your weapons too. You are walking fast towards the enemies. Have you forgotten us, your brothers? Why are you doing this, my brother?" Nakula said: "With this action of yours the hearts of your brothers have become nervous. Why this action on your part?" Sahadeva said: "Instead of fighting with them, you are exposing yourself to the enemy. Why do you do it?"

Yudhishthira did not answer any of these questions. He was walking all the time. Krishna looked at them reassuringly and said: "I see his purpose. Yudhishthira is now going to Bheeshma, Drona, Kripa and Salya to ask them for permission to fight with them. They are your elders. It has been said that if a man fights with his elders after getting their permission he is sure to win the war. If, however, he does not care to ask them for permission he will certainly be defeated. This is the reason for the strange behaviour of Yudhishthira". They walked silently after this.

Everyone was watching Yudhishthira. The Kauravas were amazed to see him. They all thought that at the last moment Yudhishthira had lost his nerve: that he was proceeding towards Bheeshma to beg him to stop the war. Yudhishthira came near the army which surrounded Bheeshma. It made way for him. Bheeshma was waiting for this noblest of men, with a smile on his lips. Yudhishthira came near him. His eyes were full of tears. He fell at the feet of Bheeshma, and so did his brothers. Yudhishthira said: "My lord, war has now become inevitable. We have to fight with you. Please bless us and say that we will come out of the war with victory". Bheeshma was pleased with this gesture on the part of Yudhishthira. He said: "My child, you know that victory is yours. Krishna is on your side. That means that Dharma is on your side. Man is a slave to wealth and not wealth to man. I have to fight against you since my wealth is that of the Kaurava monarch. I have no right to the throne of the Pauravas. I renounced it long ago. I have been supported by the king. It is my duty to fight for him. But you know that my love and blessings will always be yours". Yudhishthira went to Drona, Kripa and Salya. Having obtained their permission and blessings, he returned to his camp. When he came back, they all knew that war was to start any moment and that the Pandavas would win.

When Yudhishthira was talking to Salya, Krishna managed to go to Radheya. He said: "Radheya, I hear that because of your hatred for Bheeshma you have sworn not to fight until he dies. Once he is killed you have got to fight. Even now it is not too late. Come away

to the side of the Pandavas. Or, why not join them for a few days? You can fight with Bheeshma, your enemy. After he is dead you can go back to Duryodhana". Radheya laughed at Krishna and said: "Why these childish arguments, Krishna? Indeed, your affection for the Pandavas is great! But, my lord, I am fond of my friend Duryodhana, and I have already laid my life down for him. It is all a question of days, Krishna, just days. Leave me to my fate. It has been ordained that way. No one can change it". Krishna's eyes were filled with tears at the sight of this man, the noblest and the most unfortunate of all the heroes that were to die in a few days.

Having returned from the presence of Bheeshma, Yudhishthira announced to both the armies: "The war is just about to begin. If there is anyone on the side of the Kauravas who is willing to join me, he is welcome". Hearing these words of Yudhishthira, Yuyutsu, one of the brothers of Duryodhana, came to Yudhishthira and said: "I wish to come away to your side if you will have me". Yudhishthira was pleased with him. He said: "Certainly! I am glad you are coming to our side. I am glad that, when my uncle Dhritarashtra dies, *one* of his sons will be alive to perform the funeral rites for him". These gentle but deadly words, coming from the lips of Yudhishthira, made the Kauravas lose their complacency for a moment and they shuddered involuntarily since they were at once reminded of the oath of Bheema. Yudhishthira embraced Yuyutsu and welcomed him.

Yudhishthira put on his armour: then Bheema: then Arjuna: then Nakula and then Sahadeva. The sight of these great men was terrible. They looked really angry and formidable like death. All the warriors ascended their chariots. Conchs were blown on either side. War drums and trumpets filled the air with din.

Duryodhana watched the army of the Pandavas and the expert manner in which the Vyuha had been arranged. He pondered for a moment and went to Drona. He said: "Look, my lord! Look at this immense army of the Pandavas. Dhrishtadyumna, your disciple, has been responsible for this excellent vyuha. I can see all the many heroes there, all as mighty as Bheema or Arjuna. There, right in the van, I can see Satyaki. Further up, the two veterans Virata and Drupada are stationed. Look this side. The powerful Dhrishtaketu, Chekitana and the Lord of Kasi are just waiting for the war to begin. Just behind them I can see Purujit, Kunti Bhoja and Saibya. Two other sons of Drupada are by the side of Arjuna's chariot: Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas. Abhimanyu is there with the sons of Draupadi. They are all maharathikas, my lord. Let us turn our eyes to our army. I will repeat the names of the mighty men on our side Your honoured self, and Bheeshma, the Kuru ancient; Radheya the undaunted is here, and

Kripa. He has never once known what it is to lose in a battle. Aswatthama and Vikarna are with me, and Bhoorisravas, the son of Somadatta. These are but a few of the many heroes who have laid down their lives for me. This army of mine is unlimited, led by Bheeshma, my dear revered grandfather, while their army seems to be limited though protected by Bheema. My lord, in the war which is to begin any moment now, I want you all to guard Bheeshma".

Bheeshma saw from a distance Duryodhana scanning the armies on either side and he saw him conferring with his guru Drona. Bheeshma wanted to cheer the heart of his grandson and so he let forth his battle-cry like the roar of a lion and blew his conch. It was taken up by the others. From the golden chariot of Arjuna, yoked with the famed white horses, came the pure notes of the Panchajanya and then came the notes from Arjuna's conch Devadatta. Bheema took up his Paundra and blew on it. Yudhishthira next took up his Anantavijaya. Nakula put his conch Sughosha to his lips and Sahadeva's Manipushpaka could be heard after that. Then followed all the others blowing their conchs one after the other: the King of Kasi, Sikhandi, Satyaki, Dhrishtadyumna, Virata, Drupada, the sons of Draupadi, and Abhimanyu. The sound of all the many conchs together was formidable and the very heavens resounded with the terrible reverberation.

Chapter 3

THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

Arjuna's chariot had come to the front. His banner was presided over by Hanuman. He could now see the sons of Dhritarashtra and the vyuha set up by his grandfather. In the deafening noise set up by the several conchs and the war drums and trumpets Arjuna, taking up his Gandiva in his hand, said: "Krishna, set my chariot right in the midst of the two contending armies. I want to see all the heroes who are arrayed against us. I want to have a good look on these men who are so eager for battle. I want to see with whom I have to fight in this war. I want to see all the many heroes who are so eager to please Duryodhana".

The chariot rumbled a few yards ahead and Krishna placed it just where Arjuna wanted it: in front of Bheeshma, Drona and the others. He said: "Look, Arjuna! Look at this great army with Bheeshma

and Drona leading it. Look on all the Kauravas assembled here to die at your hands".

Arjuna cast his eyes on the grand spectacle. He saw the heroes ready for battle, and he saw there all those who were dear to him. They were his grandfathers, teachers, uncles, brothers, sons, dear friends, comrades. He looked again and again at them and all on a sudden he was overcome with infinite compassion for all of them. His voice shook with grief and he said: "Krishna, I feel an awful weakness stealing over me. My mouth has gone dry all on a sudden and I am trembling all over. Krishna, my head is reeling and I feel faint. My limbs refuse to bear me up. My form burns as if with fever and my Gandiva is slipping from my grasp. I look at all these who are my kinsmen and I feel that I cannot fight with them. Look on all these omens, Krishna. They do not bode any good to anyone. I do not think there is any good in killing my kinsmen. I do not want to win this war. I do not want any kingdoms nor do I want the pleasures of this world. I do not see any use for them. These great heroes all mean so much to me and they are there, ready to fight. I will never kill them: not for lordship of the three worlds. For the passing pleasure of ruling this world why should I kill the sons of Dhritarashtra? They have been greedy; evil; avaricious; covetous. I grant all that. But the fact remains that they are my cousins and it is a sin to kill one's own kinsmen. I would rather turn away from the war. It will even be better if I am killed by Duryodhana. I do not want to fight". Arjuna collapsed on the seat of his chariot. He had thrown away his bow and arrows and his heart was laden with grief. His eyes were filled with tears and his heart with great pity.

Krishna looked at him for a moment and said: "Arjuna, how did this uneasiness steal over you? Can you not realise that the situation is critical? You have reached a crisis in your life and you allow yourself to be swayed by these feelings. This feeling is anything but noble. It will lead you away from heaven. It will be a blot on your fair name. You are courting ignominy. Throw away this momentary weakness of heart and get up. Do not forget your manliness. Come Arjuna, get ready for the fight".

Arjuna would not be shaken out of his despondency. "How can I aim my arrows at Bheeshma and Drona? Krishna, they have to be worshipped by me and instead, I am trying to kill them. It is not right. Their blood will tinge every enjoyment which I may get in this world later. I cannot do it. Krishna, you know that I am not a coward. This is not weakness. It is compassion for the enemy. I do not know what I am to do. You tell me. Tell me what I should do. I leave it in your hands. Do with me what you will. I am sure nothing

will wipe away this grief: not even the rewards promised in heaven and earth". Arjuna sat silent, refusing to fight.

Krishna smiled a little at Arjuna and said: "Arjuna, you are grieving for those who do not have to be grieved for. And yet, you talk as though you are very wise. A wise man never weeps. He weeps not for the dead, nor for the living.

"Believe me, the Eternal soul is imperishable. No one can comprehend it. It is only the bodies that are impermanent. Does not one pass the different stages in life, childhood, youth and old age? It is the body which goes through these stages. And even as these are natural stages, death, which is the fourth stage, is natural too. Death makes the soul pass from one body to another. It is only when the senses clash with the objects of the senses that there come into being heat and cold, which affect the body: pleasure and pain which affect the mind. These are but passing clouds and they do not last for ever. You should learn to bear with them. When you learn to be unaffected by them you become fit for immortality.

"All this immense universe is pervaded by the Eternal and that can never be destroyed. Arjuna, you think that you are the one who kills and your victim thinks that he is killed. But then, you are both wrong. You do not kill and your victim is not killed. He cannot be killed. What is not born can never die. It is not slain when the body is slain. Once you know that it is imperishable and eternal, once you know that it has no birth and no change, how can you slay? Once a garment is old and torn, man throws it away and he takes up a new garment. Even so, the soul, when the body becomes old, worn out, unlivable, abandons it and takes up a new body. You say that you are killing your enemy. You are wrong. Weapons cannot hurt the soul; fire cannot burn it; and water cannot wet it. It is Eternal and it is the same for ever. Once you realize this truth there is no need for you to grieve.

"Let us assume that you do not know the highest Truth. Even then you should not grieve. You know that a man's death is decided the moment he is born. Whenever anything is born it is sure to die: and whenever anything dies it is sure to be born again. And so, you should not grieve. How things and beings come into the world is a mystery and the end is again a mystery. We know only the portion which is intermediate: this transit on the earth. Why then should you grieve? The soul that resides in the body can never die, and so there is no need for you to weep.

"Even if you do not comprehend all this, let me tell you that you should fight since you are a kshatriya. It is your duty to fight. A righteous war is the greatest good that can happen to a kshatriya. By

chance it has just come to happen for you. The gates of heaven are opened out to you. If you turn away from this war, which is a righteous war, you are courting infamy. You are shirking from your duty, and that is a sin. The world will talk about this shameful behaviour of yours, and, for a man who has had so many honours heaped on him in times of yore, this will be worse than death. Who, do you think, will understand the motives which prompted you to turn away from fighting? They will think that you are afraid to fight. You will be slighted by men who thought well of you once. Your enemies will laugh at you and slander you. Can anything be more painful than this?

"If you die fighting, you are assured of a place in heaven. If you win this war, this earth is yours. Make up your mind and rise up, Arjuna. You have to fight. You must.

"You are afraid that sin will cling to you. I will tell you how you can escape sin. Treat pleasure and pain alike; gain and loss alike, loss and victory alike. Let not your mind be troubled by thoughts on these. Get ready just to fight and, I can assure you, you will not incur any sin.

"I will tell you more about this rule of conduct. It is called Buddhi Yoga. If you follow it you will escape the bondage of Karma: the bondage following work which looks for results, benefits, fruits. This is not like the Karma Kanda of the rituals where there is the danger of incurring sin because of a single lapse in the procedure. The yoga I am talking about is different. No effort is ever lost and no harm is ever done. Follow it but a little and you will be free of the Great Fear. Arjuna, try and rise above the reach of the three gunas. Try to be unaffected by the pairs of opposites. Think only on purity. Do not think of possessing anything. Think only of the soul and let that be the one aim in you. Do not think of other things.

"Your duty is to work. Your right is only to the work. As for the fruits of the work, you have no right on them. Do not think of that at all. When you perform an action, do not think of the results or rewards. But then, do not delude yourself that inaction will help you. No. You have no right to be inactive, either. Do not attach yourself to anything. Do your work with an evenness of mind. You must be unaffected either by success or failure. It is this evenness of mind which is called Yoga."

Arjuna intervened and asked: "Krishna, tell me more about the man who has evenness of mind: whose intellect is steady: whose mind is unclouded. Describe him to me".

Krishna must have been pleased when he found that Arjuna showed signs of waking up from the stupor he had fallen into. Warming up to

his subject, Krishna said: "I will be happy to tell you that. He is called a Sthitaprajna. The first thing about him is the fact that he has cast off all the desires of the mind and his spirit finds comfort in itself. His pulse does not fail when sorrow approaches him and it does not beat faster when joy approaches him. Three things have no place in his mental make-up: desire, fear and anger. He is never attached to anyone or anything. Good and evil are treated with the same equanimity by him. He does not rejoice and he does not hate. A man with evenness of mind withdraws his senses into him as a tortoise does its limbs. Once the senses are withdrawn, the soul loses the appetite for the objects of the senses. Even the taste for them, which may linger on, will drop away when the Supreme is realized.

"It is by no means easy. The wisest of men will find that, sometimes, the senses will rebel and sweep the mind in their current and then the mind will be like a boat tossed to and fro in a gale. The senses should be controlled and this is possible if you meditate on me. Once attachment for the objects of the senses is given a place in the mind it will be disastrous. Because, attachment gives rise to desire and desire breeds anger. The next step is delusion and the mind gets confused and understanding is lost. Destruction follows in its wake. So, the senses should be controlled, and the man into whom all desires enter as the waters enter into the sea, attains peace. This is the Divine state and that is the bliss of the Brahmic state from where no man can ever fall again".

Arjuna, who had been listening carefully, intervened with a question: "Krishna, you say that the realization of the Brahman is the highest state. Why then do you ask me to do this dreadful task?"

Krishna said: "There are two pathways of approach to that state. One is Knowledge by meditation, and the other is Work for men of action. Remember, no man can be still, even for a moment. He has to do work. It is the law of nature that man should work. You may find a man who sits still without doing anything. But his mind is still engaged in the world of the senses. He is a hypocrite. There is then the other type of man, the Sthitaprajna I spoke about. He has controlled his senses along with the mind, and when he works he does so without attachment. He is infinitely superior to any other kind of man. You must do your duty. By not working, you cannot live. Even the bodily functions need work to sustain them.

"How then, can one escape the bondage of work? By performing work as a sacrifice. Give up your attachments and work as though you are performing a sacrifice for the general good. That is the secret of work well done. Work should be done so that others may benefit by it and not you. Dedicate all the work to me, and fight. Fix your

mind on the Eternal Spirit. Detach your mind from all traces of desire and self. Then, when you do your duty, the sin or the benefit as the case may be, do neither of them cling to you, and you are free."

Arjuna said: "I understand what you say. But, Krishna, man is sometimes driven to commit sin, in spite of himself: in spite of his best intentions: against his better nature. He is almost driven to it. Why does it happen?"

Krishna said: "I know what you mean. It is desire which prompts a man to commit sin. It is wrath which prompts man to commit sin. Consider these two as the direst enemies of man. True knowledge is hidden inside, and it is enveloped by these. A flame is enveloped by smoke and a mirror is covered by dust. The unborn child is hidden in the womb. Even so, the soul inside you is not seen by you because of these obstructions. A breath of air is enough to clear the smoke hiding the flame; for a man of the Sattvic type a slight effort is enough to reveal the god in him. The mirror has to be wiped by a cloth and it becomes clear; a slightly greater effort is needed by a man of the Rajasic type to realize the Supreme. The child has to wait for months before it can free itself of the womb which holds it; even so, it is harder for a man of the Tamasic type to free himself from the senses and realize the Brahman."

Krishna then decided to let Arjuna get a glimpse of the Divinity that is Himself. He deliberately said: "I taught this yoga to Vivasvan: he spoke about it to Manu and Manu told Ikshwaku. This has been handed down from generation to generation. It has been eclipsed in recent times, and now I am telling you the secret since you are my friend. You are dear to me".

"But, Krishna", said Arjuna, "Vivasvan was so many eons of time before you were born. I do not understand how you could have taught him!"

Krishna smiled a little and said: "I have passed through many births and so have you. I know all of them, and you do not. I am the Unborn and the Eternal. I am the Lord of everything. When there is a dearth of righteousness in the world, when there is a danger of lawlessness becoming prevalent in the world, I appear: I incarnate myself. I am born yuga after yuga to protect the good: to destroy the wicked: to establish and propagate Dharma. It is not given to everyone to know the Divinity that is Me. But the chosen few who know it will never be born again but will reach Me. They will have no fear: no anger: no passion. They seek refuge in Me and they are lost in Me. The fire of Knowledge would have made them pure and they become one with Me. It is no matter in what manner they approach

Me: in what form they worship Me. All paths lead to Me and I accept them.

"I will tell you more about the yoga of work. Any undertaking of man should be free from a desire for the fruits of it. He will then be always happy. He will always be working, and yet he is doing no work at all in the real sense of the word since he does not attach any importance to the fruits of it. Knowledge of the Divine reduces all work to ashes, and man is free of all bondage. A man prompted by selfless action, by knowledge, has all his doubts destroyed and he becomes one with Me. When you renounce the fruits of action to Me, you attain a disciplined state of mind and you attain peace. But the other man, prompted by desire, who is not selfless, becomes attached to the fruits of his work and he is bound; he gets involved in the world. A real yogi, a sanyasin, is one who does the work he ought to do and does not seek the fruits thereof. Renunciation is selfless work. True renunciation is renunciation of desire and nothing else. Work is the only means to attain the yoga of renunciation. Once it is attained, serenity comes to the mind, of its own accord.

"The pleasures that arise from attachment are only sources of pain. They have a beginning and end and anything which has a beginning and an end is never a source of eternal joy. A wise man should avoid them. When a man reaches the stage when cold and heat, pleasure and pain, honour and dishonour, seem alike, he is ever serene. A clod of earth, a stone and a piece of gold, will all look alike to him. He can see no difference between friends and foes, indifferent people and impartial ones, hateful persons and even righteous persons. Such a man is supreme.

"Listen to me carefully, Arjuna. I will tell you the secret of secrets. I have assumed the human form, and so fools do not recognize me as the Lord of all beings. I am the ONE, the Distinct. Worshipping Me will lead one to the Supreme state which is Myself. I am the Father of this universe. I am the goal of all meditation and worship Those who meditate on Me and worship Me and only Me will reach Me in the end. It is so very easy to win My grace. Anything you do, anything you eat, anything you give away, any sacrifice you perform, dedicate it all to Me. You will then be free of the bondage of Karma: from the good and evil fruits of your work. You will be free to come to Me."

Arjuna said: "Tell me how I can know you by constant meditation. I want to know all about your power and your grandeur. I want to know where I should look for you. Where do you dwell?"

Krishna said: "I am the Soul dwelling in the heart of everything. I am the Beginning, the Middle and the End. Of the Adityas I am

Vishnu. Of the lights I am the sun. Among the stars I am the moon. Of the Vedas I am the Sama. Of the senses I am the mind and in the living beings I am the intellect. Of the Rudras I am Sankara. Of the mountains I am Meru. Of words, I am the great AUM. Of the weapons, I am the thunderbolt. Of those that measure I am Time. I am Death that destroys all and I am the origin of things that are yet to be born. The germ of all living beings is Myself. There is nothing moving or unmoving that can exist without Me. Anything endowed with grandeur, with beauty, with strength, has sprung only from a spark of My splendour. I stand pervading the universe with a single fragment of Me".

Arjuna said: "I desire to see your Divine Form. Lord of the Yogis, if you think I am fit enough to behold It, reveal to me your Form".

Krishna granted him divine eyes and revealed to Arjuna His Divine Form. Like the light of a thousand suns, the splendour of the Mighty One was seen by Arjuna. He beheld the entire universe with all its myriad manifestations all gathered together in one. He bowed his head to the Lord. Pressing his palms together in incessant salutation he said: "Lord of Lords! In Thy body I see all the gods and all the varied hosts of beings as well. I see Brahma and all the rishis. You are infinite in form. There is no beginning or middle or end. You are a glowing mass of light. You are the Imperishable, the Supreme that has to be realized. You are the home of this entire Universe. You are the Guardian of the Eternal law. You are the Primal Being. Your eyes are the sun and moon, and Your face is glowing with the radiance of fire, and this universe is being devoured by the fire that is You. By Thee are filled the interspaces of heaven and earth and the sky. Looking on you, the world trembles and so do I.

"I see all the sons of Dhritarashtra and all the many warriors, Bheeshma, Drona, Radheya and the great heroes on our side too, rushing into your fearful mouth. Like mountain rivers rushing in tumult into the great ocean, they are rushing into your mouth which is all fire. They seem like a flight of moths that rush towards a burning flame, and they are perishing fast.

"Have mercy on me, tell me who you are. What is the purpose of this destruction that strikes terror into me?"

Krishna said: "Can you not recognize Me? I am TIME the great destroyer. I destroy the mighty world. I have begun to slay all these many heroes here. They will all die, every one of them. Arise now, Arjuna, and win fame. These men have already been slain by Me. You can be just the instrument with which I destroy them. Bheeshma,

Drona, Radheya, Jayadratha and others as well are doomed. You kill them and win the war".

Arjuna's voice was choking and his words came falteringly. He folded his palms together and said: "Infinite Being! Lord of the Lords! Abode of the World! You are the Imperishable: the Being and what lies beyond. You are the first of the gods: the Primal Being. You are the Supreme Treasure of the world. You are the Knower and You are what is to be known. You are the Abode of everything. This entire universe is pervaded by Thee. Infinite is Your form: infinite Your power: infinite Your might. You pervade everything and you are everything. You are the Father of the world and all the other worlds. You are the object of worship and You are the greatest teacher. Nothing can equal You. Not in the three worlds. I prostrate before You and seek Your mercy. Unaware of Your greatness I called You as 'Krishna' and 'friend'. Forgive me my ignorance. Bear with me as a father with a son: as a friend with a friend: as a lover with his beloved. Please assume Your former figure. I find I cannot bear to see this form of Yours".

The Lord abandoned his Viswaroopa and became Krishna, the charioteer of Arjuna once again.

Arjuna said: "My mind has become serene only now, after seeing your old familiar form once again".

Krishna said: "This form of mine cannot be seen easily. I can be known only by devotion, incessant devotion to me".

Arjuna said: "There are devotees who worship you and again, there are others who worship the Absolute. Which of these two is the better yogi?"

Krishna said: "Both of them reach me. Some worship the Absolute, the Imperishable. They have all their senses subdued. They are even-minded under all conditions. They are ever engaged in doing good to all beings. And they contemplate on the Absolute and they come to me. Those who fix their minds on me, worship me with supreme faith and steadfastly, are considered by me to be perfect yogis. It is a hard path which the worshipper of the Absolute treads. The goal is harder to reach. The other path is easy. When all actions are dedicated to me, when I am regarded as the dearest object of worship, when they meditate on me and worship me with single-hearted devotion, I save them soon from death and from the ocean called mortal life. Fix your mind on me alone and let your thoughts rest in me. Without a doubt you will live in me and me alone".

Arjuna said: "I want to know the true nature of Sanyasa and resignation. Tell me about them".

Krishna said: "The sages say that relinquishing of all works that are prompted by desire, is renunciation. Surrendering the fruits of all works is called Tyaga. Some say that all work should be abandoned as evil and others say that works of sacrifice, gifts and penance should not be given up. But I will tell you the real truth of the matter.

"Work of any kind should not be given up. Work has to be performed. But it should be done with surrender of all attachment for the fruits. This does not mean that one should renounce duty. It should be performed and only the fruits and attachment should be renounced. The doer who is free from attachment, who has no feeling of 'I', who is steady and zealous, who is unmoved by success or failure, whose mind is unattached everywhere, who has subdued his self and has no desires, is worthy of becoming one with God.

"Endowed with a clear vision, firmly restraining himself, turning away from the senses and the objects of the senses, casting aside likes and dislikes, dwelling in solitude, restraining his speech, body and mind, ever engaged in meditation and concentration, cultivating freedom from passion, casting aside conceit, violence, pride, desire, wrath and possession, and tranquil in mind, he becomes worthy of becoming one with God.

"Having become one with God and tranquil in spirit he neither grieves nor desires. He regards all beings alike and he is devoted to me. He may be always engaged in all kinds of work and yet, having found refuge in me, he reaches the eternal and indestructible by my grace.

"Fix your mind on me. Be devoted to me. Sacrifice to me. Prostrate yourself before me and you will come to me. I promise to you all this most solemnly, because you are dear to me.

"Surrender all duties and come to me alone for shelter. Have no grief. I will release you from all sins. I have declared to you the wisdom more secret than all secrets. Consider it fully. Review it in your mind and then act as you will".

Arjuna said: "My delusion is gone. I am no longer in doubt. I will act according to thy command".

With a happy laugh, which lit up his face, Arjuna took up his Gandiva. And the Lord took the reins of the white horses in his left hand and the whip in his right hand. The golden chariot of Arjuna began to move towards where Bheeshma's silver chariot stood.

CHAPTER 4

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

The war began. The first move was from the Kauravas. With Bheeshma in the van, Dussasana advanced towards the enemy army. The Pandavas with Dhrishtadyumna sprang into action at once. The sight was terrible. The noise was deafening. Over and above the noise of the onslaught could be heard the roars of Bheema who was as excited as a lion let loose. He rushed at the army of Duryodhana. The brothers of the king defended the army from the mad rush of Bheema. Twelve of the sons of Dhritarashtra were opposing Bheema. They covered him with a shower of arrows. With their bows and arrows they defended their army from the wrath of Bheema. Seeing so many of them harass Bheema, there came to his help the sons of Draupadi, Abhimanyu, Nakula, Sahadeva and the brave Dhrishtadyumna. The fight between the two teams was fierce. All of them were excellent archers and good fighters. It was like two forests caught in a gale. All the people stood still and looked on this fight. The two armies fought furiously. When the sun reached the zenith the fury had not abated.

Bheeshma advanced towards the enemy ranks and he was met by Arjuna. Arjuna's bow did not have a moment's rest. Arrows flew faster than rain drops. Satyaki encountered Kritavarma. Abhimanyu met Brihadbala, the king of the Kosalas. Brihadbala cut the banner of Abhimanyu with his sharp arrows. Abhimanyu was furious. The two warriors were equally matched. Bheema met Duryodhana. They rained arrows on each other. Dussasana met Nakula in single combat. Durmukha, a brother of Duryodhana, accosted Sahadeva. Salya and Yudhishthira had a fight. Dhrishtadyumna accosted the acharya Drona. At the end of the afternoon fight the Pandava army had lost many of its soldiers. Bheeshma was literally ploughing through their ranks. He had advanced quite far into the army of the Pandavas. Five great heroes had been sent by the king to protect the foolhardy old man. They were Durmukha, Kritavarma, Kripa, Salya and Vivimsati. The banner of Bheeshma could not be seen: so thick was the dust which rose up as his chariot rattled through the ranks. He was so very quick and alert, it looked as though he was just dancing. People paused and watched him as he stood in his chariot with his bow raised, raining arrows continually. Abhimanyu, with great fury, rushed against the old fighter. He met Bheeshma and all his supporters single-handed.

His arrows were sharper than cutting words. He hurt Salya, Kritavarma and Bheeshma with several arrows. His fighting was wonderful. The enemies were amazed at the prowess of this young child. He cut the banner of Bheeshma. He was terrible like a god in anger. Several heroes of the Pandava army approached him to give him their support: Virata with his sons, Dhrishtadyumna, Bheema, the brave Kekaya brothers and Satyaki.

Uttara Kumara, the young son of Virata, had quickly blossomed into a great fighter. The young boy who ran away from the chariot on looking at the Kaurava army, had now disappeared. In his place was a great hero who was ready to face Bheeshma and Salya in single combat. He was seated on a huge elephant and he accosted Salya. He warded off the arrows of Salya with his own. He killed the horses of Salya. Salya was now very angry. He sent towards the heart of Uttara a terrible javelin. It went right into the heart of the young prince, piercing his armour. Uttara Kumara fell on the neck of his elephant with his chest rent open.

Looking at his younger brother dead, Sweta, another son of Virata, rushed on Salya with every intention of killing him. He wanted to avenge the death of his brother. He saw Salya surrounded by seven great warriors. But that did not deter him. He covered the enemy with a mantle of arrows. It looked as though Salya had been caught in the jaws of death. Bheeshma came to his help. The old man found it very hard to withstand the attack of Sweta. Bheeshma's banner was cut, his horses were killed and he was without a chariot. So terrible was the fighting of young Sweta. Finally a sharp javelin was despatched by Bheeshma. It pierced through the armour of Sweta and the young prince of Virata fell down dead, killed in the first day's fighting. People did not know that the sun had set. He had reached the top of the western hill. They were so intent on the great fight. The sun had set. Both the commanders withdrew their troops. The first day's engagement was over. The Pandavas had lost heavily. It was a great day for the Kauravas. The chief losses on the side of the Pandavas were Uttara and Sweta, the sons of Virata. A huge slice of the army had been mowed down by their grandfather.

The king Duryodhana was delirious with joy. He felt that, at the rate at which his grandfather was destroying the army of the enemies, the war should be over soon. Duryodhana was sure of his victory.

Yudhishthira, on the other hand, was extremely depressed at the way things were going. Looking at the slaughter in his army, he was despondent. He approached Krishna and said: "Krishna, look at the devastation in the army. Bheeshma is indeed terrible. He looks like a tongue of flame licking up the forest which has been dried by the

sun in summer. The great Kuru veteran is invincible. In a weak moment I agreed to fight this war. I realize my foolishness now. I will go back to the forest. I have no right to let all these be killed by Bheeshma because of my desire for the kingdom. Krishna, you have been watching the war since morning. Tell me what should be done tomorrow. This beloved brother of mine, Bheema, is the only one among us who is fighting willingly. He has been causing havoc in the ranks of the enemies. But how long can he withstand the astras of Bheeshma and Drona? They will hurl their divine astras against my dear handsome Bheema; what can we do then? I am so depressed".

Krishna tried to pacify the grieving Yudhishthira. He said: "Yudhishthira, please do not give way to this depression. We have so many great heroes with us. Why should you worry? I am here, and you have Satyaki, Dhrishtadyumna and so many other heroes. Sikhandi will certainly be the cause of the fall of the great Bheeshma". All the others pacified the king. Dhrishtadyumna spoke words of encouragement to Yudhishthira. After some talk about the events of the day, they all went to their tents to snatch some rest before the sun dawned again on another day of bloody war.

Chapter 5

THE SECOND DAY

The morning of the second day of the terrible war dawned. Yudhishthira said: "I think it will be sensible if we arrange our army in the Krauncha formation". Arjuna and Dhrishtadyumna were busy arranging the troops. At the head of the army were placed Drupada and his army. The eye of the bird was Kunti Bhoja and the king of the Chedis. The neck was formed by the army of Satyaki. At the tail of the bird was stationed Yudhishthira. The wings were formed by Bheema with his army on one side and by the commander and his army on the other. The sons of Draupadi and Satyaki were guarding these wings. The phalanx was formidable. Duryodhana saw the Krauncha Vyuha and approached his guru Drona and Kripa. He said: "They have arranged their army in this formidable formation. Still our army is more terrible. You are all great enough each to kill the sons of Pandu single-handed. I depend on you to see me safely through this great war". Drona assured him that they would put in their best possible effort. With the

help of Drona, Bheeshma began to arrange his army. He too decided on the Krauncha vyuha. Bhoorisravas and Salya were guarding the wing on the left while the right was in the immediate care of Somadatta and the king of Kamboja. Aswatthama, Kripa and Kritavarma were stationed near the tail of the bird.

The battle drums brayed once again. The conchs were blown once again. The fight began suddenly as it did the previous day. The fighting today was more intense and more cruel than it was on the first day. Blood flowed in rivulets all over the field. Bodies of dead men and horses and elephants were scattered all over the place. Hawks and crows were circling the field, waiting for the evening to approach. Bheeshma was found fighting with Bheema, Abhimanyu, Satyaki, the Kekaya brothers, Virata and with Dhrishtadyumna. All of them together were not able to stop the advance of Bheeshma. He was coming like a hurricane leaving behind him utter devastation. The army was falling as fast as his arrows. Arjuna watched this from a distance. He told Krishna: "Our grandfather is spitting wrath today. Our army is suffering. Take me to his presence quickly. Bheeshma is being supported by Drona, Kripa, Salya, Vikarna and the other brothers of the king. They are in turn being harassed by Drupada. I must kill Bheeshma if our army is to be saved". Krishna said: "You are right. The sooner you meet Bheeshma the better it will be for your soldiers".

Krishna steered the chariot of Arjuna quickly towards the place where Bheeshma was stationed. The fight was splendid to watch. If it had not been for the fact that they were losing so many of their soldiers, Arjuna would have spent hours watching the dexterity with which the old man was handling his bow. The grand man was death himself. Arjuna came face to face with Bheeshma. There were only three people in the entire Kaurava army who could face Arjuna. They were Bheeshma, Drona and Radheya. Bheeshma began to discharge his arrows. With him came Drona to fight Arjuna. Drona was joined by Duryodhana and Jayadratha. Vikarna was also there. Arjuna withstood the attack from all of them. He hurt Bheeshma and Drona with his arrows. Arjuna was seen from a distance by Satyaki. He rushed to Arjuna's help. With him came Virata, Dhrishtadyumna, the sons of Draupadi and Abhimanyu. The sons of Draupadi diverted the attention of Drona by their arrows. Bheeshma hurt Arjuna. Arjuna's bow was bent almost to a circle, so fast were the arrows flying out of it. Each looked like a serpent spitting poison. He was killing the men in the Kaurava army systematically and very quickly. The sight struck terror into the heart of Duryodhana. He approached Bheeshma and said: "This combination of Krishna and Arjuna is terrible. You are not doing your best to kill him. When you are here, and when Drona

is looking on, this should not happen. It is obvious that you are both too soft with Arjuna. He is your favourite. I wish I had my Radheya on the field. Because of your insulting words he has sworn that he will not fight as long as you are on the field. I hope you will do something to check Arjuna and his fury".

Bheeshma was disgusted with the cruel words of Duryodhana. He cursed himself for having been born a kshatriya. He advanced with fury towards Arjuna. Both the heroes had white horses. The meeting was thrilling. Several people rushed to Bheeshma to be his protectors. Arjuna was also surrounded by his brothers and others. Bheeshma hurt Krishna in the chest with a terrible arrow. Arjuna killed the charioteer of his grandfather. The fighting stopped in several places on the field. Everyone stood still, watching this duel between Bheeshma and Arjuna. Each was as powerful as the other. There was no chance of either withdrawing. It was a grand sight. Arjuna had destroyed a huge portion of the Kaurava army. The sight was making Duryodhana very angry. On the other side of the field there was a great fight between Drona and Drupada. The old enemies were giving vent to their ire against each other. Dhrishtadyumna came to assist his father. Drona hurled a javelin against Dhrishtadyumna. It looked as fearful as the weapon of Death himself. Dhrishtadyumna, however, amazed the on-lookers by checking the weapon with his arrows. He hurled a javelin which made Drona fall down under the impact. But he got up and staved off the weapons of Dhrishtadyumna.

Bheema came to the help of his friend. Duryodhana saw the condition of Drona. He sent the king of Kalinga with his army for the protection of the acharya. Virata and Drupada were fighting with Drona and the Kalinga king was met by Bheema. Ketuman came to help Kalinga. Kalinga's son, named Sakradeva, came to help his father. Bheema was harassed on all sides by these men. But he did not even notice it. After a furious fight Bheema killed Sakradeva. The father saw his son being killed. He was wild with anger and sorrow. He fought furiously. Bhanuman came to his help. Bheema killed Bhanuman. Bheema fought like a mad elephant. He rushed into the ranks of the enemies like a wild elephant and devastated the army. He frightened everyone with his wild looks and his terrible war cry. The kings Satya and Satyadeva, who were protecting Kalinga on either side of his chariot, were killed by Bheema. Kalinga was hurt and he fainted away in his chariot which was led away.

Sikhandi and a portion of the army came to help Bheema. Dhrishtadyumna rushed to the side of Bheema. His favourites were Bheema and Satyaki. He could not let anything happen to Bheema. In a moment Satyaki arrived on the scene. The great trio fought with

the Kalinga army. `Bheeshma heard the great upheaval in the army because of the havoc caused by these three. He hurried to the spot and confronted them. The three fought very well. Bheema was standing just in front of Bheeshma. The old man sent a huge big javelin towards the chariot of Bheema. Before it reached him Bheema jumped out of his chariot. He broke the javelin into three pieces. Satyaki killed the charioteer of Bheeshma with his arrows. With his charioteer killed Bheeshma had to turn away from the fight. There was great joy in the hearts of the three at this retreat of Bheeshma. The army of Kalinga had been routed already. They embraced each other in glee. The Kalinga king had also been killed. Satyaki jumped from his chariot and went to Bheema. He said: "You have today killed Kalinga, his son Ketuman, Satya, Satyajit, and the entire army of these and also Bhanuman. Great is your achievement". He embraced him warmly.

It was midday. Aswatthama met the sons of Drupada. Abhimanyu came to their help. Kripa and Drona came to help Aswatthama. Abhimanyu was challenged by Lakshmana, the son of the king. The fight was very beautiful to watch. The two children were as powerful as their fathers. Duryodhana saw his son being harassed by Abhimanyu. He rushed to his help. Several warriors surrounded the son of Arjuna. But he was undaunted. Bheeshma and Drona went again to Arjuna and there was another glorious combat. But none could fight the great Arjuna. He was wonderful. Bheeshma spoke to Drona: "My dear Acharya, Arjuna is impossible today. It is not possible to fight with him. He has already destroyed a large portion of the army. He looks like Sankara Himself with the trident in his hand. I cannot fight with him. The great Kaurava army is dwindling by his efforts. The army is now frightened. It is almost time for the sun to set. Let the army now withdraw. It is not possible to continue the fight with nervous soldiers. They will fight better tomorrow. Let us retire".

The sun had set. All the troops went back to their tents. There was great joy in the Pandava camp today. Sakradeva, Bhanuman, Ketuman, Satyadeva, Satya, the king of the Kalingas and almost the entire Kalinga army had been destroyed, and all by Bheema. Bheema was the hero of the day. Dhrishtadyumna and Satyaki praised him again and again. The talk then veered round to the grand duels fought by Arjuna. Yudhishthira was very happy. He listened to all their talks with a smile on his lips.

The Kauravas were, of course, very depressed today. Contrary to his certainty, Duryodhana realized that the war was not going to end in a day. He had been sure that the Pandavas would be killed during the first day's war and if they managed to come out of it alive, they would not see the sun set on the second day. But his hopes were just

hopes. He was just beginning to realize that it was not easy to defy the Pandavas. He had eleven Akshauhinis and the Pandavas had seven. He had thought that his army was unlimited while theirs was limited. He had Bheeshma, Drona and so many other heroes, and yet it looked as though the Pandavas could not be defeated. He cursed Bheema and his brother Arjuna. There seemed to be some truth in the words of his grandfather and his guru and his uncle Vidura: that it was not possible to defeat Arjuna.

CHAPTER 6

KRISHNA'S ANGER

Early next morning Bheeshma arranged his army in the shape of Garuda, the sacred eagle. The beak was Bheeshma. The eyes were Drona and Kritavarma. Aswatthama and Kripa made up the head of the bird. The Trigartas and Jayadratha, with their armies, formed the neck. The king was behind them at the heart of the bird with his brothers and Vinda and Anuvinda, the Avanti brothers. The tail was formed by a huge army under the control of Brihadbala, the king of Kosala.

Arjuna saw the phalanx arranged by his grandfather and, in consultation with the commander Dhrishtadyumna, he arranged the Pandava army in the shape of a crescent. On the right side of the crescent, the horn, was stationed Bheema. Along the lip were placed in increasing thickness, Drupada and Virata with their armies. Then came Neela and, after him, Dhrishtaketu. Dhrishtadyumna and his brother Sikhandi came next. At the centre of the crescent was Yudhishthira with his army of elephants. The narrowing crescent proceeded to the left. Satyaki and the five sons of Draupadi were there, then came Abhimanyu and his step-brother Iravan. Then came Ghatotkacha and then the Kekayas. At the left tip, was stationed the chariot of Arjuna with Krishna holding the reins of the white horses. The Kaurava army, refreshed by sleep, was looking forward to the battle.

In a few moments the fight began. The general fight went on furiously. Bheeshma was today supported by Drona, Jayadratha, Purumitra, Vikarna, and the wily Sakuni. They were faced by Bheema, Satyaki, Ghatotkacha and the sons of Draupadi. The sun could not be seen because of the dust which had risen in the battle-field. Duryodhana accosted Ghatotkacha with a hundred chariots to help him.

Bheeshma was in form. He was killing as though he was in a frenzy of destruction. Arjuna saw it and advanced towards Bheeshma. He faced a great opposition. The infuriated Kauravas fought very well. Abhimanyu and Satyaki fought with Sakuni and his attendants. The chariot of Satyaki was destroyed by Sakuni. He jumped into Abhimanyu's chariot and continued to fight. Bheeshma and Drona now proceeded against the elephant army of Yudhishthira. The sons of Maadri were there to help Yudhishthira. The fight went on in several parts of the field. The prowess of Ghatotkacha was seen only today. He was greater than even his father in fighting. He very easily destroyed the great army of Duryodhana. There was a fight between the two. Bheema came now to fight with Duryodhana, his dearest enemy. Duryodhana was hurt by the onslaught of Bheema and he fainted in his chariot. His charioteer took him away quietly from the fighting area. Drona and Bheeshma began to harass Bheema. Satyaki had come to assist Bheema.

Duryodhana had recovered from the faint and he came back to the front. He saw the havoc caused in his army by Bheema and Satyaki. He was terrified by the sight of his army dwindling down at an alarmingly fast rate. He rushed to the side of Bheeshma and said: "It is not right that this should happen when you are here. Drona and his son Aswatthama are alive and still this is happening to my army. The Pandavas, surely, are not powerful enough to defy all of you! It is not difficult for me to guess the reason for this. The sons of Pandu are your favourites. You like them immensely. You are all partial to the Pandavas. That is why you are allowing this wild killing of our soldiers. Drona is just like you. You do not like to fight with the Pandavas. If you had told me even at the beginning of the war that you did not like to fight, I would not have asked you to be the commander of my army. If you have thoughts of abandoning me, both of you can tell me so. I will ask Radheya to fight. If you have any affection for me, both of you must fight to the best of your abilities and destroy my enemies". Bheeshma heard the words of Duryodhana, which were so much sharper than his own arrows. He laughed at the king and said: "My child, for the last so many days—why, years!—I have been telling you that the Pandavas are invincible: that Indra himself cannot withstand their attack. But you would not listen. It is because we love you that we have agreed to fight on your side. I am trying my best. I am an old man and I am trying to behave like a young man and fight with the terrible Pandavas. See me fight. I am going to kill the enemy army as I have not done till now". Bheeshma, like an elephant which had been most cruelly prodded by the mahout, rushed against the army of the Pandavas with renewed energy. He

blew his conch and the noise warned the Pandavas that the old man was very angry. It was midday. The Pandavas had so far been very happy since they had been winning easily. They were now rudely shaken out of their complacency.

Bheeshma's bow was singing, so constant was the twang of its string. The river of blood began to flow in torrents now. The Kuru veteran was ploughing through the ranks, and flood flowed in his wake. No one could come near him. He fought like one possessed. He was all over the field. Arjuna saw him in the east, and the next moment he was in the west. It looked as though he had taken the centre of the stage for himself and had no intention of leaving it. The army was being slaughtered fast. Not one on the Pandava side was able to stand up to him. Krishna saw the state of affairs and spoke to Arjuna: "Arjuna, I can see that the time has come when you will have to justify your words. In the midst of kings you said that you would destroy the Kaurava army led by Bheeshma, Drona and all the others. You said that you could destroy everyone of them. Make these words of yours come true. It is not right that you should allow this weakness to come over your heart. You are thinking only of the fact that Bheeshma is your grandfather. But take a look at our army. Look how it is being destroyed by him. Have you no pity for them? The army is melting like snow at the touch of the sun." Arjuna was impressed by the words of Krishna. He said: "Take me to him, Krishna. I will fight with him".

Everyone was happy to see the chariot of Arjuna proceeding towards Bheeshma. The combat began. The banner of Bheeshma was felled at one stroke by Arjuna. His quick and active fighting was greatly appreciated by the old man. He saw how beautiful Arjuna looked with his bow always bent and with the arrows pouring out of it. Bheeshma said: "Well done, Arjuna! Only you can do this magnificent deed. I am immensely pleased with you. Come, let us continue the fight". The fight went on. Krishna saw the terrible wrath of Bheeshma. He also saw that Arjuna was deliberately soft in hitting Bheeshma. He could see that the Pandava army had absolutely no chance unless the old man was stopped in his track. Krishna told himself: "My friend Arjuna is not able to forget that he is fighting with his dear old grandfather. I think I will have to forget the oath that I will not fight in this war. I will kill this man for the sake of the Pandavas. I must lift the burden off the shoulders of Yudhishthira. Arjuna has forgotten his duty in spite of my telling him often. I must do something about this". Even as he was thinking thus, Bheeshma sent arrows which hurt Krishna. Bheeshma was supported by Drona, Vikarna, Jayadratha, Bhoorisravas and several others. All of them attacked Arjuna. They

had every intention of killing him. So fierce was their fighting. Satyaki was alarmed at the condition of Arjuna. He rushed up to his help. The others stood by and watched helplessly. They were not able to meet Bheeshma. The army of Yudhishthira rushed to help Arjuna. Even Satyaki was able to notice the gentle fighting of Arjuna. Krishna could not bear it any more. He saw Satyaki and he was pleased with his valour and his courage. He looked at Satyaki and said: "Watch me, Satyaki. Watch me kill this terrible old man Bheeshma and his friend Drona. I find that I have to take a hand in this fighting and kill them. I must please Yudhishthira and Bheema and the twins. Arjuna is letting us down very badly. I have sworn to make Yudhishthira king of the world. If I do not kill these men now, my promise will go. I have promised to Draupadi that the blood of these sinners will stain the earth. I must make her happy. I have to punish these men for their sins".

The great Krishna forgot his human form. He thought of his divine form. He was now the great destroyer Narayana. He thought of his Chakra called Sudarsana. Even as he thought of it he found it in his hand. With the Chakra in his hand the great Narayana shone like the God of Death. He jumped from the chariot. Brandishing the Chakra in his right hand he came and stood before Bheeshma. He looked like an angry lion standing before a wild mad elephant. With his brow glowing with anger the great Krishna was seen by everyone. All the knowing ones thought that the end of the world had come. Seeing him in front of his chariot, Bheeshma said: "I bow down to you, Lord of Lords. I have been honoured by this your appearance. Please grant me release from this human bondage. Please kill me. There will be no glory greater than death at your hands. I will have the greatest honour bestowed upon me if you kill me now. Can you not see that I want to die? That I have been wanting to die, all these so many years? I want death. I want to go away from here. I am sick of life. I cannot die. Please kill me and grant me the freedom which has been denied to me because of the curse of Satyavati. Please kill me now". The great Bheeshma spoke thus to Krishna and prepared himself to fight.

Seeing that Krishna was ready to fight, Arjuna jumped down from his chariot. He rushed to Krishna's side. He caught hold of his right hand. Krishna was wild with anger. He tried to shake off the restraining hand of Arjuna. But in desperation Arjuna clung to his right arm. He fell at the feet of Krishna. His heart was beating fast. His eyes were blinded by his tears. He would not let Krishna take one step forward. He said: "No. You must not be angry. You must not do this. You must forgive me". Krishna was slightly mollified.

He paused and looked at Arjuna. Looking at his angry eyes, Arjuna said: "Krishna, please take back your anger. You must not break your oath. You have sworn not to fight. In your anger against me you must not do this. I swear, on the name of my child, that I will fight the Kauravas as I promised. I will fight with my full fury against Bheeshma. You must not be false to your words". Seeing the state of Arjuna, Krishna was pacified. He calmly got into his chariot and took up the reins of the horses in his beautiful left hand. The smile which would always be on his lips, was not there.

Krishna took up his Panchajanya and blew it lustily. Arjuna blew his Devadatta, and the four quarters resounded with the noise. Bheeshma, accompanied by Bhoorisravas, advanced like a shooting star raining fire. The fighting of Arjuna was terrible. He withstood all the arrows of the great Kauravas. The Kaurava army was being destroyed by the sharp arrows of Arjuna. He began to send his divine missiles against Bheeshma. It was now Arjuna's turn to be terrible. He sent the astra called Aindra and he destroyed a large portion of the army. Bheeshma, Drona, and Baahlika saw the ruin in their army caused by Arjuna. They saw the west red with the rays of the setting sun. They decided that the armies should be withdrawn.

The third day's fighting was over. The Kaurava monarch was desperate. He saw today the terrible form of Arjuna in action. He was afraid that the words of his elders might prove to be true. Arjuna seemed to be invincible.

CHAPTER 7

DURYODHANA'S DESPAIR

The fourth day of the war dawned. Bheeshma was determined to do his best and destroy half the army of the enemies. Drona and the king with several others had accompanied him to the front of the army. Bheeshma first advanced towards Arjuna. From a distance Arjuna saw him coming and met him halfway. Drona and his followers met the oncoming chariot of Arjuna. Abhimanyu went to meet this team. He fought with Drona, Kripa, Salya, Vivimsati, Somadatta and the king. There was no difference between Abhimanyu and his father. He was wonderful with his bow and arrow. People were amazed to see so much prowess in so young a person. Bheeshma left him and went in search of Arjuna. The combat was worth watching. In the mean-

time Abhimanyu was assaulted by a new set of men, Aswatthama, Bhoorisravas, Salya, Chitrasena and the son of Sala. Arjuna saw from a distance the fighting of his son and cheered him from there. Dhrishtadyumna saw the unequal fight between Abhimanyu and the others He came to the help of the young man.

The Trigartas came to Arjuna. Susarma and his son were fighting. Dhrishtadyumna joined Arjuna and the fight went on. The Trigartas were joined by Kripa, Kritavarma and Salya. The son of Sala came to join the fight. Dhrishtadyumna was very angry at this onslaught. He fought furiously. The son of Sala and Salya were fighting very well. But the commander of the Pandava army was too strong for them. With his powerful mace he split the head of Sala's son. There was great commotion in the army at the sight of this killing. Sala was furious with Dhrishtadyumna. He leaped at him and fought for all he was worth. Now Salya joined the fight. A wonderful duel was fought between Salya and Dhrishtadyumna. Abhimanyu came to the help of their commander. Now came several brothers of the king. Bheema was watching. He saw that the warriors were unequally matched. He rushed to the spot. Duryodhana also had come to the front. Bheema was very happy to see so many of the sons of Dhritarashtra. Nakula and Sahadeva were there too. The fight went on for a long time. Duryodhana fought as one inspired. Looking at Duryodhana, Bheema thought that he would kill him and raised his mace. The brothers of the king were terrified at the sight of Bheema. Duryodhana sent the king of the Magadhas to harass Bheema with his army. The sons of Draupadi joined in the fight. The king of the Magadhas advanced towards Abhimanyu with his huge elephant. Abhimanyu killed the elephant. Bheema was just dancing on the field like a lion in the midst of elephants. The elephant army of Magadha was being destroyed at a fast pace by Bheema. He was surrounded by the immense bodies of the elephants and the many warriors. He was looking like Sankara dancing his death dance in the burning-ground.

A further portion of the army was sent by Duryodhana to defy Bheema, who was not in the least affected by the size of the army. Bheema stood like Mount Meru surrounded by masses of rain clouds. Dhrishtadyumna was assisting Bheema. The sons of Draupadi and Sikhandi were there. Suddenly Bheema found himself facing Bheeshma. He went on fighting. But Satyaki was concerned about him and rushed to his help. A rakshasa named Alambusa joined the warring princes. He was a good friend of Duryodhana. But Satyaki defied him effortlessly.

Bheema's anger was now at its height. He raised his mace and rushed towards the sons of Dhtitarashtra. He rushed on them like a

wolf on a herd of cows. With a sharp hit he killed one brother of Duryodhana. He spoke to himself: "Ninety-nine more". He killed some more of them one after the other. Eight of the brothers of Duryodhana were killed within a few moments. Bheeshma saw the havoc caused by Bheema. He said: "Bheema's anger has reached its height. Something must be done before he kills more of them". He sent the great Bhagadatta. Bhagadatta, with his great elephant, came towards Bheema and began to fight with him. It was a magnificent elephant. It attacked all the heroes. The earth trembled under its tread. Seated on the immense elephant, the king of the city of Pragjyotisha hurled a terrible javelin at Bheema. Bheema fainted at the impact of the javelin on his immense chest. It was like a shaft of lightning. Ghatotkacha saw that his father had fainted. He rushed at once to the spot. He used his maya tactics to fight with the enemy. He rode on an elephant and marched against Bhagadatta. It was not possible for Bhagadatta to cope up with Ghatotkacha. Bheeshma saw the condition of Bhagadatta. He spoke to Drona and Duryodhana: "Bhagadatta seems to be finding it difficult to withstand the son of Bheema. Ghatotkacha is an easily excitable person. His anger has been roused because his father was made to faint. He is a rakshasa and, as for our Bhagadatta, his temper is phenomenal. It is not right to let them continue the fight. Let us proceed to their neighbourhood. Bheema has joined the fight now. Father and son will be terrible to oppose. The army there will be destroyed completely. Let us hasten to the rescue of Bhagadatta".

Hearing these words of concern spoken by the commander, many warriors rushed to the spot where Bheema and Ghatotkacha were holding the ground. Several of the heroes on the side of the Pandavas went to the help of Bheema and his son. The impact of the two armies was dreadful. It was a noise which threatened to rend the sky. Ghatotkacha was in excellent form. He was literally wiping out the enemy army. Bheeshma spoke once again. He said: "I do not think it is advisable to fight with the son of Bheema now. He has now got many supporters too. Not Indra, nor even the Rudras, will be able to oppose him at this stage. Our army has got to be saved from his fury. The sun is about to set. My horses are extremely tired and I am tired too. Let us stop the fight now. Now that it is evening, the strength of Ghatotkacha will increase at an alarming rate. We will withdraw our army. We will fight tomorrow".

The Kaurava army was withdrawn according to the wishes of the commander. The Pandavas saw that the army of the Kauravas had retired earlier than usual. They knew that it was the fear for Ghatotkacha that made them retire like that. They were very happy at the way

things had progressed that day. Blowing their conchs and trumpets they retired to their camps. Ghatotkacha was embraced with affection by Yudhishthira. It was clear that he was the hero of the day.

The Kauravas retired to their camp. Everyone was tired. Each man slept the sleep of exhaustion. But not Duryodhana. He sat alone in his tent. With his head resting on his palm he sat for hours. Tears were flowing unrestrained from his red eyes. He had lost his brothers: eight of them. His sorrow was great. It looked as though Bheema would keep his promise and kill all his unfortunate brothers. He thought of the picture of the coming death of Dussasana. It had been painted vividly by Krishna and Bheema. His frame shuddered to think of it. But he brushed away the thought and stood up. He told himself that he was not going to allow it. He would stop it somehow. Listlessly he prepared himself to rest. To rest, but not sleep. He was too upset to sleep. Suddenly he got up from the bed. He walked to the tent of his grandfather. He sat by his side and said: "Grandfather, I am unhappy. Eight of my brothers have been killed by Bheema. You, Drona, Aswatthama, Kripa, Kritavarma, Boorisravas, Bhagadatta and Vikarna were all there. Could you not have prevented the death of my brothers? Each one of you is able to defy the gods in war. Why then, could you not do this for me? This strength of the Pandavas is something I cannot understand. How is it that they are able to stand against you all? How are they able to win everyday? Please tell me that"

Bheeshma smiled gently. He said: "My child, Duryodhana, this is what I have been trying to tell you all these days. Even now I am telling you. Make it up with Yudhishthira. Live with the rest of your brothers. Do not let this terrible war continue. I have been trying to tell you that it is not possible to defeat the Pandavas. You want to know by what power they are able to withstand me and Drona. I will tell you. They have Krishna with them. That is the reason why they are invincible. Krishna is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu and he has been born in the world for the destruction of evil. The greatest of the great walks the earth of ordinary men by the name of Krishna. The Pandavas are men who have not swerved from the path of Dharma even by a hair's breadth. Krishna has therefore become their friend. He has taken upon himself the task of saving the five Pandavas and with his help they are destroying evil in the world. This earth will have a blood-letting of all the proud arrogant kings and will be the purer for it. The Pandavas are invincible. Please do not entertain the slightest doubt about it. So long as Krishna is with them, no one would hurt them. I ask you to consider their strength once again. Stop this war. Four days of fighting have shown you how it is all going to

end." Duryodhana listened to the words of his grandfather. He got up and walked away quietly to his tent with his head downcast.

Bheeshma sat for a long time. He was feeling sorry for this grandson of his. But he knew that Duryodhana would win or die. He was the last person to think of any compromise, specially in the middle of the fight. He was jealous of his reputation. He could not bear to be called a coward. He would walk to his death even if he were convinced that he should not have fought with the Pandavas. With a tearful sigh the old man lay down. He could not sleep either. His mind was crowded with many thoughts. He saw again, in his mind, the beautiful way in which Arjuna fought with him. He then thought of the valour of Abhimanyu, the child. A tender smile lit up the face of Bheeshma. He saw again, Krishna with the Chakra in his hand. It would have been so wonderful if he had killed him. He would have got his release earlier than he thought. But that could not be. His mother Satyavati had told him that he had no right to die until the Kuru House had been established firmly on the ancient throne of the Pauravas. That meant that he had to live and see the death of everyone. Until Yudhishthira was installed as the monarch on the Paurava throne, he had no right to die. He had to live. With another sigh Bheeshma turned over in his bed as if to turn his back on all thoughts worrying him. He decided to do his best to hasten the end of the world. Everyone had to die. He had to watch the death of everyone. The thoughts of Ganga came to his mind. He felt a child again. He thought of the days when she would sit by his side telling him stories until he went to sleep. Bheeshma thought of his days of childhood, and sleep came to his tired eyes. He slept a long dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER 8

THE FIFTH AND SIXTH DAYS

The fifth day of the war dawned. The sun had just appeared as a red rim over the edge of the eastern horizon. Bheeshma began to arrange his army in the Makara Vyuha. Arjuna, Dhrishtadyumna and Yudhishthira thought that their army should be in the form of a hawk. Bheema was the beak of the bird. Sikhandi and Dhrishtadyumna were the eyes of the hawk. The head was Satyaki and Arjuna was the neck of the bird. The left wing was formed by Drupada and Virata and

the right was formed by the Kekaya brothers. The back of the bird was formed by Abhimanyu and the sons of Draupadi. The tail was the eldest Pandava Yudhishthira accompanied by Nakula and Sahadeva. Bheema entered the great tortoise-shaped army of the Kauravas.

Bheema met Bheeshma at the outset. Bheeshma had begun his destruction already. Arjuna hurried to his presence. Only he could counteract the divine astras of Bheeshma. Duryodhana went to Drona. He thought of the death of his brothers the previous day. He said: "You are my well-wisher. I am depending on you and my grandfather to help me. You are able to defy the gods in fight. After all, the power of the Pandavas is far inferior to yours". Drona sighed with anger. He said: "You are foolish to expect the defeat of the Pandavas. Even now you cannot realize that they are invincible. We will try our best to do our duty: more than that is not possible". Drona did not wait to hear the reply of Duryodhana. He rode towards the army of the Pandavas. Satyaki was there to meet his onslaught. It was a glorious duel which was fought between the two. Bheema came to help Satyaki. The team was getting strengthened on either side. Drona, Bheeshma and Salya were now facing Bheema, Satyaki, Abhimanyu and the sons of Drupada. The fight now threatened to become a duel between Sikhandi and Bheeshma. Drona remembered the words of Duryodhana at the beginning of the war: that all of them should protect Bheeshma from Sikhandi. He therefore challenged Sikhandi. Already Bheeshma had turned away from the presence of Sikhandi since he was a woman reborn as a man. All the Pandavas now harassed the old man. The team was led by Arjuna. Bheeshma was eager to save the sons of Dhritarashtra from the wrath of Bheema. Hence he fought with him himself. The day had now reached its middle. The sun burned down on them from the zenith. The war had taken its toll of thousands of warriors. The battle-field was slippery with the mire of blood and the dead bodies of men and horses and elephants. Arjuna rushed at Bheeshma. Hearing the music of the conchs of Krishna and Arjuna, the army was struck with terror. All the heroes on the side of Duryodhana rallied round the banner of Bheeshma. There was a great fight between the two armies.

Virata hurt Bheeshma with sharp arrows. The great man turned his angry eyes on Virata and fought back furiously. The powerful Aswatthama fought with Arjuna. It was thrilling to see the fight between the two favourites of Drona. One was the son and the other was almost a son, so dear was Arjuna to the acharya. Arjuna praised the prowess of Aswatthama and during the fight he managed to go elsewhere. He did not enjoy this fight with the son of his guru. He saw Duryodhana fighting with Bheema. He passed them. Bheema

had hurt Duryodhana with his sharp arrows. But the king fought on, not minding the pain in the chest. Abhimanyu was cutting away the army as a sickle cuts a field ripe with corn. He was killing them by thousands and hundreds. No one could stop the advance of the young lion. Lakshmana, the son of Duryodhana, defied him for a while. But he was wounded by Abhimanyu, and Kripa carried him away from the field.

Satyaki was in excellent form. Everyone could see that he was a student of Arjuna. The same lightness of touch was there. The same quickness was found. Everyone was watching the grace with which Satyaki fought. Satyaki fought a grand duel with his old enemy Bhoorisravas. The fight went on for a long time. They fought like infuriated lions. Bheema was looking on from a distance. When he thought that the fight had made both of them tired he came and took Satyaki in his own chariot. The duel between Bheeshma and Arjuna still went on. It was not possible for either to make the other retreat.

The sun had set. Bheeshma saw that the faces of all the men were pale and haggard. It was a very tiring day. He withdrew from the field with his men. The coming of the night was welcome to all the men. They were exhausted physically and mentally. Arjuna was very unhappy because he had to fight with his grandfather. He hated to wound his acharya with his arrows. How he hated the war and Duryodhana who was the cause of it!

The sixth day of the war dawned. The Pandavas had arranged their army in the Makara formation. The counter vyuha of the Kauravas was the Krauncha. The war began as intensely as on the previous day. The first encounter was between Bheema and Drona. Bheema first killed the charioteer of Drona. Drona took the reins in his own hands and continued to fight. He began to destroy the Pandava army. Bheeshma and Drona were intent on only one thing: the destruction of the army. They could not make up their minds to kill any of the Pandavas. They fought with them but they would not try and hurt them fatally. Bheema was returning their attack. The army of Duryodhana was suffering terrible loss because of the prowess of Arjuna and Abhimanyu and the sons of Draupadi on one side and Bheema, Dhrishtadyumna and Satyaki on the other. Arjuna was supported by Nakula and Sahadeva. The brothers of Duryodhana tried to arrest the progress of Bheema. They could do nothing. As soon as Bheema entered the vyuha, the people cried: "Here comes the terrible Bheema. Let us take leave of our lives. We are going to be killed any moment now". Bheema was first going in his chariot. He felt that the progress of the chariot was not fast enough. He jumped from it and took up

his mace in his hand. He entered the army like a storm cloud entering a clear sky. Destruction followed in his wake.

Dhrishtadyumna wanted to help Bheema. He entered the field and there he saw Visoka, the charioteer of Bheema, sitting desolately in the empty chariot. He could not see Bheema. He feared the worst. He asked Visoka: "Where is Bheema? He is dearer to me than my very life. Where is he?" Visoka told him about the decision of Bheema to enter the army with the mace in his hand. Dhrishtadyumna was worried about his friend and the rashness with which he had gone into the heart of the army. He hurried to his help. He spoke to himself: "There is no use in my living if anything happens to Bheema. He must not die. If I return to the camp without Bheema, how can I face the others? I would rather spend all my days in hell than live without Bheema. He is my friend. The powerful Bheema is my guru and I am his devotee. I must hurry to the place where Bheema is and help him if he is alive. If he is dead, then I will kill the man who has killed him and then I will die. I will not return to the camp without Bheema". With these thoughts in his mind Dhrishtadyumna went into the heart of the enemy army. The path of Bheema could be seen by the bodies of the dead, which had been felled just then. Blood had not stopped flowing from the wounds of the dead. Dhrishtadyumna saw his hero in action. Like a gale uprooting trees he was playing havoc there. Bheema saw his friend. The two enjoyed themselves wading through the river of blood which they had caused to flow. Duryodhana saw that Dhrishtadyumna had joined Bheema. He said: "The awful son of Drupada has now joined Bheema. They will now destroy everything if we do not do some quick thinking". He sent some of his brothers to oppose the two.

In the meantime Drona and Drupada had met in single combat. Drupada was not powerful enough to defy the great Drona. Drona was returning from the combat. Dhrishtadyumna had, just then, sent an astra called Pramohana which had the power of making everyone lose consciousness. Drona saw the brothers of Duryodhana caught in the spell of the astra. He sent the counter astra and woke them up. They began to fight again with Bheema and Dhrishtadyumna. Abhimanyu was sent with a big army to help Bheema and Dhrishtadyumna. There were others who accompanied Abhimanyu and they all entered the enemy army. They formed a new vyuha called Soocheemukha, meaning the point of a needle, and advanced to the neighbourhood of Bheema. Dhrishtadyumna turned his attention to Drona. His chariot was made useless by Drona. He had killed his horses. He jumped into the chariot of Abhimanyu and continued the fight.

Bheema came back to his chariot and continued to fight with the

brothers of the king. They fought for a long time but finally they had to retreat. Abhimanyu and Vikarna fought a duel which was wonderful to watch. Each was as strong as the other. No one could decide who was the better fighter.

Duryodhana and Bheema met once again. Bheema decided to kill Duryodhana. So intense was his hatred that he would not stop even when help came to Duryodhana. The fight went on for some time. At last, not being able to withstand the fury of Bheema, Duryodhana fainted away. Jayadratha carried him away in his chariot. Kripa helped Jayadratha to take away the king from the field of battle. Bheema fought with Jayadratha. Several men came to the help of both, and the fight became general once again. Evening came on slowly. The sun had set. The armies were withdrawn.

Yudhishthira's camp resounded with the cheers of everyone. Bheema and Dhrishtadyumna were the heroes of the day. Everyone was happy to know that the destruction in the Kaurava army was because of these two. The sixth day's war was over. Excepting the first day, the camp of the Pandavas was resounding with the music of conchs and trumpets and drums everyday, announcing their joy.

As usual, Duryodhana went to the tent of his grandfather and spoke about the grief in his heart. He said: "The Pandavas are happy. They have destroyed such a large portion of my army. Bheema managed to enter our impenetrable vyuha even at the early part of the day. He and Dhrishtadyumna have caused so much damage that I am feeling desperate. You must destroy the Pandavas at once. They must be killed. I will not have peace otherwise". Bheeshma said: "It is not right that you should speak thus. I have been doing my best to please you. I am trying to win this war for you. When their army is destroyed they will be defeated. But there are great heroes on the side of the Pandavas. It is not easy to stop them from killing our soldiers. I am gambling with my life and I am fighting. I have nothing left to live for. I might as well die in my attempt to please you. I will fight with the Pandavas to the best of my ability. No one can do more than that. As for killing them, it is not possible for anyone to do it. You cannot ask me to do it. I told you even at the beginning of the war that I will not kill the Pandavas. They are as dear to me as you are. But be assured that I will try my best to defeat them. Go, my child, go and sleep. You have been hurt very much by the arrows of Bheema. Here is a potion. Drink it. It will relieve you of your pain". Bheeshma gave him the potion and sent him to bed tenderly.

Chapter 9

SIKHANDI'S VAIN ATTEMPTS

The seventh day of the war dawned. Bheeshma arranged his army in the Mandala vyuha. It was a circular formation. It was difficult to penetrate. Yudhishthira asked Arjuna to arrange their army in the Vajra vyuha. It was almost as impregnable as that of the Kauravas. The encounter began. Drona attacked Virata and Drupada. Aswatthama attacked Sikhandi. Duryodhana met Dhrishtadyumna. Nakula and Sahadeva opposed their uncle Salya. Vinda and Anuvinda fought with Arjuna. Bheema was opposing Kritavarma. Abhimanyu was facing Chitrasena, Vikarna and Dussasana. Bhagadatta was facing Ghatotkacha. Satyaki fought with Alambusa the rakshasa. Bhoorisravas met Dhrishtaketu and Yudhishthira was facing Srutayus. Chekitana was facing Kripa. Today's war promised to be a series of duels. Arjuna looked at the army and spoke in an angry voice to Krishna: "Look at the skill of Bheeshma. Look how he has arranged his army. He thinks that we will not be able to enter it without a great loss to us. There are the Trigartas waiting for a fight with me. I am going to destroy them today". Arjuna twanged the string of the Gandiva. He began to rain arrows on the Trigartas and all the kings who had assembled to defy him. The army was being shaken out of the formation. Arjuna dispatched the astra by name Aindra. It began to rain arrows on the opponents. It caused panic in the enemy ranks. The phalanx was broken up in a matter of moments. The army rushed to Bheeshma for succour. Bheeshma was the raft that would save them from being drowned.

Susarma, the king of the Trigartas, had to beat a hasty retreat. Bheeshma hastened towards Arjuna. Duryodhana was very upset to see the prowess of Arjuna and the way he had broken up the phalanx. He came quickly to Susarma who was to have guarded the vyuha. He said: "My grandfather is going to fight with Arjuna. It is up to you all to support him. Please protect him from the enemies". The king hurried to the neighbourhood of Bheeshma. The old man suddenly attacked Arjuna. With his silver chariot and the white horses yoked to it, the grand old man presented a fine picture as he drove towards Arjuna. The fight was terrible. Never before had they fought as they fought today. There was no fight at all in any other part of the field. Everyone was bent on watching this duel which looked as though it would never end. It was not possible to look at the terrible form of

Bheeshma. Surrounded by the Trigartas and the brothers of the king, he was formidable. Duryodhana was behind him.

The others now began their fights. Drona fought with Virata. His bow was broken by Virata. His banner was cut too. His charioteer was the next victim. Drona killed the charioteer of Virata. Virata ascended the chariot of his son Sankha and the two of them fought with Drona. They fought beautifully. The great Drona was furious with them. He sent a terrible arrow against Sankha. The arrow pierced the armour of the young man and fell on the ground, red with the blood of the young prince. Sankha's bow fell from his lifeless fingers and his body fell out of the chariot. Virata saw his son dead. This was the third child of his to die. He was very angry with Drona. But he was helpless against his power. He left the chariot and went away from the battle-field with his head downcast. Everyone was sorry for Virata. But it was all part of one's luck. War meant death: death of one's nearest and dearest.

Drona continued his work of destruction. The duel between Aswatthama and Sikhandi was still going on. Sikhandi hurt his opponent with three arrows which lodged on his forehead. Angry because of the extreme pain, Aswatthama killed the charioteer of Sikhandi and his horses too. With a sword in his hand Sikhandi whirled it about his head and fought with Aswatthama. He looked like a hawk wheeling about his prey. It was a terrifying sight. Aswatthama sent a number of arrows at him. Sikhandi warded off all the arrows with his sword. He flung the sword at Aswatthama and jumped into the chariot of Satyaki.

Satyaki fought with Alambusa. Alambusa tried his maya tactics. He was considered to be invincible. But he was no match for Satyaki. He rained arrows from the sky on Satyaki. But Satyaki sent Aindra astra which destroyed the maya of the rakshasa. Arrows flowed from the astra like drops of rain, and Alambusa could not face this. He fled away from Satyaki's presence. Dhrishtadyumna fought with Duryodhana. The king fought very valiantly. He treated the onslaught of Dhrishtadyumna with contempt. He was made to lose his chariot by Dhrishtadyumna. Duryodhana fought on foot. Sakuni came to his help. He gave his chariot to the king. After a while Duryodhana was defeated by Dhrishtadyumna. Satyaki concentrated on the destruction of the army.

Kritavarma faced Bheema. Bheema killed his horses and he made his banner fall down. Kritavarma felt as though his body had been broken up into fragments. He had to get into the chariot of Sakuni and withdraw from the fight. Bheema had now time to do his favourite task: the destruction of the elephant army.

The Kaurava army was doing its best to withstand the attack of the Pandavas. But it was not possible. Their valour was just insignificant beside that of the opponents. The water of the Ganga is sweet. But the sweetness is lost when the river loses itself in the sea. Even so the valour of the Kauravas was being swallowed up by the greater valour of the Pandavas. No blame could be attached to the Kauravas. They fought like inspired beings. Only, the other side was too powerful. It looked as though the Kauravas were bent on just one thing: the reaching of the heavens meant for those who die on the field of battle.

The fight between Bhagadatta and Ghatotkacha was one of the highlights of the day. In a chariot glowing like the morning sun, Ghatotkacha approached the king of Pragjyotisha. Bhagadatta was seated on his wonderful elephant. He looked like Indra on his white elephant Airavata. The fighters were equally matched. Each hurt the other and each was treating the other with contempt. The smile did not leave the face of Bhagadatta when he received the intensely sharp arrows of Ghatotkacha. He killed the horses of his chariot. In anger Ghatotkacha hurled a javelin at Bhagadatta. But it was caught and broken into three pieces. Ghatotkacha had to leave the field. He could not fight with this wonderful opponent. The elephant of Bhagadatta began to destroy the army of the Pandavas.

Salya fought with his nephews Nakula and Sahadeva. He was pleased with their valour. With a smile he felled the banner of Nakula and with an arrow he killed his charioteer. The horses were the next to be killed. Nakula got into the chariot of Sahadeva. Together they fought against their uncle. Sahadeva was furious with his uncle. He threw a terrible javelin at him. It robbed Salya of his senses and he fell down in a faint. His chariot was led away from the field.

It was mid-day. Yudhishthira sped in the direction of the warrior called Srutayus. He began his attack with a big shower of arrows. Srutayus returned the attack of Yudhishthira. One of his arrows broke the armour of Yudhishthira. But Yudhishthira treated it casually. He sent an arrow which cut the banner of Srutayus and felled it to the ground. Yudhishthira looked like an angry cobra. The field was amazed at the expression on the face of the Pandava prince. They had always seen Yudhishthira as a gentle and pleasant person and this aspect of him was terrible. They could not believe that he was capable of so much anger. The fight went on. Srutayus sent an arrow which was aimed at the chest of Yudhishthira who cut it into fragments. Yudhishthira killed the horses of Srutayus. With his horses killed, Srutayus was afraid to continue the fight. He ran away from the field. Yudhishthira went unchallenged into the army and began to destroy

it. Kripa fared badly in his fight with Chekitana. He had to be carried out of the field by Sakuni. Three of the brothers of Duryodhana were harassing Abhimanyu. But Abhimanyu soon had them at his mercy. He could have killed them. But he remembered the oath of his uncle and so left them alive. Bheeshma came to the rescue of the Kaurava princes. He now faced Abhimanyu. Arjuna saw it. He said: "Krishna, grandfather is going to have a tough time with our young lion. Take my chariot wherever you please. I am bent on destroying this army. Let us proceed". Arjuna passed through the ranks, raining havoc. He was stopped by Susarma. Arjuna said: "Listen to me, Susarma. I know that you are a great fighter. I also know that you are still nursing that ancient hatred against me. It began with the days of the Rajasuya. You have not forgiven me for defeating you then. Come, let me show your ancestors to you in a few moments". There was a fight. The Trigartas attacked Arjuna from all sides. The fight was long and fearful. Arjuna killed many of the supporters of Susarma and proceeded towards the chariot of Bheeshma.

Sikhandi and several others came to the help of Arjuna. Duryodhana and Jayadratha saw Arjuna proceeding towards Bheeshma. A team came to protect Bheeshma. The five Pandavas had reached the chariot of Bheeshma. It was a grand sight. Bheeshma faced all of them with a smiling face. His bow was raining arrows on all of them. But his face was raining smiles on these dear grandsons of his. It looked like rain falling while sunshine is warming the earth. Bheeshma was proud of the valour of the sons of Pandu. Yudhishthira was standing undaunted when the arrows of Bheeshma fell on him. Nakula and Sahadeva had come there after the retreat of Salya. Bheema was of course there. The king Duryodhana and Jayadratha hurried to the spot. Kripa and Salya with Sala, Chitrasena and others came to the help of the commander. The old man was in excellent form. He tore the Pandavas to pieces. They had absolutely no chance against him. Yudhishthira was very angry with Bheeshma. He looked at Sikhandi and said: "Sikhandi, you have sworn to kill Bheeshma. You must kill him soon. He is terrible, as his name implies. The Pandava army cannot stand this much longer. You will have to hurry up". Sikhandi hurried to the chariot of Bheeshma. But Salya intervened and challenged him. Bheeshma was fighting furiously with Yudhishthira. Bheema was opposing Jayadratha. Both lost their horses and chariots. Both were fighting on foot. Bheema hit Jayadratha with his mace and made him run away from the field. Chitrasena fought with Bheema, only to faint in the duel, hit by the mace of Bheema.

Bheeshma seemed to concentrate on Yudhishthira today. He was continuing the fight which began some time back. Yudhishthira lost

his chariot and used Nakula's chariot. The three brothers fought with Bheeshma. But he was too strong for them. Other kings came to the help of the Pandavas. All their combined efforts were of no avail against Bheeshma. He fought like one possessed. It was not possible to do anything to prevent the ruin in their army. Arjuna was busy fighting with the Trigartas. They were deliberately making him take up their challenge and taking him away from the neighbourhood of Bheeshma. Arjuna was able to destroy a major portion of the Trigarta army. But he had to see the devastation in his army and could do nothing to prevent it.

The sun had set. The war had to be stopped. Each one returned to his tent. The Pandavas were successful in the individual duels. But the loss in the army was considerable. They were not so jubilant today as they were on the other days. Yudhishthira was very thoughtful. He had to do something about the old man.

Whenever Sikhandi went towards his chariot, Bheeshma would turn his face away from him and fight with someone else. This was making Sikhandi indignant. But he could do nothing about it. The promised duel with Bheeshma seemed as though it would never be fought. Sikhandi was the one person who could remember his previous birth. He thought of himself not as Sikhandi but as Amba. The sight of Bheeshma woke up the Amba in him. He wanted to release Bheeshma from the human bondage which made him a confirmed bachelor. Death would release him from his oath. Amba wanted him to be free. But Bheeshma could not understand the message of Amba. If only he would face him, then freedom would be his for the asking. Thoughts like these crowded the mind of Amba. She smiled to herself and said: "Tomorrow! I will see if I can kill him tomorrow!"

Chapter 10

GHATOTKACHA'S VALOUR

The eighth day of the war dawned. The Kaurava army was arranged in the Oormi vyuha. Oormi is the ocean. Bheeshma made the army to spread on either side like the waves of the sea. Yudhishthira asked Arjuna to arrange their army in the formation called Sringataka. It was in the form of horns. Both the vyuhas were unusual. It was the speciality of Bheeshma and Arjuna to vie with each other in this art. The hostilities began. The general fight was on.

Among the individual duels several were noteworthy. At the outset there was a dreadful duel between Bheeshma and Bheema. Bheema harassed his grandfather. He covered him with a cloak of arrows. He killed his horses and his charioteer. Duryodhana was alarmed at this. He proceeded to the spot with his brothers. Bheema was terrible today. He saw the brothers of Duryodhana. He decided that he would kill as many of them as he could. He killed eight of them one after another. Duryodhana was watching the slaughter and he could do nothing about it. Bheema's oath came back to his mind. He rushed up to Bheeshma and poured out his grief. He said: "Look at Bheema. He has got to be killed. He has killed eight more of my brothers. Try as they might, my soldiers are not able to stand up against him. They are all being destroyed. Your indifferent and partial attitude are responsible for all this. You are allowing this because you are not in the least affectionate towards me. I do not know what I am to do now". Bheeshma said: "Your words, my child, are cruel. I am fond of you. If I had not loved you I could have stayed away from this war and so could your guru Drona. You have been under the impression that the Pandavas will be easily killed. And I have been telling you again and again that it is not possible to kill the Pandavas. Duryodhana, you and your brothers are sure to be killed in this war by Bheema. There is no doubt about it. Whenever and wherever Bheema meets a son of Dhritarashtra, he will kill him at once. It has to happen that way. You cannot do anything about it. You tried to save your brothers. Could you do it? No. Bheema is terribly angry with you. I cannot prevent the revenge of Bheema. I can only say this: Make up your mind to die. See that you die a brave death. From now on, concentrate on fighting and not on the things that are beyond the power of man". With these harsh words Bheeshma brought the conversation to an end.

It was mid-day. The Pandavas were now attacking Bheeshma in combined teams. But it was all to no purpose. No one could stand against him. Bheema was destroying the elephant army and Nakula with Sahadeva was killing all the horses. There was a great loss in the army of the Kauravas. The Pandava army was equally unfortunate. Bheeshma and Drona were bent on killing everyone.

At the beginning of the war Iravan, the son of Arjuna and the Naga princess Ulupi, came to the side of the Pandavas. He approached Arjuna and said: "My mother Ulupi has sent me to you. She asked me to help you in the war". Arjuna embraced his son and welcomed him. Iravan had been fighting all these days. Today, he saw that Sakuni was doing a lot of mischief in the Pandava army. Iravan accosted Sakuni. He had brought his army with him. He was almost

the equal of Arjuna in prowess. He looked like Abhimanyu in the way he handled his weapons. He hurt Sakuni very badly. Duryodhana was watching this fight. He went to Alambusa and told him: "Arjuna's son is harassing Sakuni. You must fight with him. You must use your maya tactics and destroy him. He has become dangerous". Alambusa went and challenged Iravan. There was a terrible fight between the two. Iravan won the praise of the heroes on both the sides. But he could not for long withstand the maya tactics of Alambusa. The rakshasa cut his head off from his body.

The Pandava army was being burnt up by Bheeshma, Drona and Aswatthama. There was no way of stopping their fury. The Pandavas said: "This is impossible. There is no use in fighting with them. There is no one who can defy this team". Seeing Iravan dead, Ghatotkacha sprang into action. Duryodhana had to suffer the maya tactics of the rakshasa. Ghatotkacha played with the Kaurava army as a cat plays with an army of rats. Everyone was terrified of him. Ghatotkacha's anger was all against Duryodhana. He would not leave him alone. He challenged him again and again. He fought with all the kings who came to help Duryodhana. Bheeshma heard the noise in the army which had become panicky because of Ghatotkacha. Bheeshma said: "I am afraid Duryodhana will not be able to withstand the power of Bheema's son. But for the fact that Bheema has sworn to kill our Duryodhana, Ghatotkacha would have killed him long ago". Hearing his words several of the warriors went to help Duryodhana. They were all there: Drona, Aswatthama, Jayadratha and many others. Ghatotkacha was only more excited than ever on seeing this host. He welcomed all of them. He terrified everyone. He was shouting out in his powerful voice.

Yudhishthira heard his war-cry. He called Bheema and said: "Bheema, I hear the beautiful voice of my child Ghatotkacha. I saw several of the Kaurava heroes hurrying towards him. I am worried about his safety. I cannot send Arjuna there since he is busy defending the sons of Drupada against the wrath of Bheeshma. I want you to go and help your son. The enemies may prove too strong for the strongest of our warriors. Go and join your son". Bheema hurried to the help of his son. Father and son now proved a formidable pair. They were impossible to defy. The army of Duryodhana was destroyed in no time. Duryodhana was mad with anger. He came to fight with Bheema. Several of the warriors on either side joined the father and son, and the fight became general once again. Aswatthama took the place of Drona. He was helped by Duryodhana. They fought for a while. But when Bheema lifted up his mace and tried to kill Duryodhana, they fled from his presence. Like Bheeshma on the side of the

Kauravas, Bheema was invincible on the side of the Pandavas. His son was terrifying all the Kauravas with his valour. No one could see what was happening. No one could tackle him. Several of them had fainted away since they could not stand his powerful weapons. Almost all of them were running towards the camp. There was panic in the Kaurava army. The triumphant noise of the conchs blown by the Pandavas showed that the army of Duryodhana had been completely routed by Ghatotkacha.

Duryodhana went to his grandfather and told him about the happenings so far. He wanted him to go and kill Ghatotkacha. Bheeshma said: "Listen to me, child. I cannot do anything now. I am busy here. I will send Bhagadatta to tackle young Ghatotkacha". Bhagadatta went on his famous elephant Supritika to fight with Ghatotkacha. The Pandavas were ready to meet this great man. Bheema, Abhimanyu, Ghatotkacha, the sons of Draupadi, and several others. Bhagadatta rushed towards Bheema first. All the heroes, all of them, began to harass the coming elephant with their arrows and javelins and maces. But the course of the elephant was unimpeded. Its head was covered with blood. But still it was advancing. The entire army was held at bay by just one elephant. There now came the king of the Dasaarnas. He brought his elephant to the combat. He was able to make the elephant of Bhagadatta stop in its course. The two elephants were standing, each blocking the path of the other. It was a wonderful sight. The elephant of Bhagadatta would not budge by the breadth of a hair even. Bhagadatta sent arrow after arrow against the king of the Dasaarnas, who had to retreat. There was a loud cheer set up on the side of the Kauravas. The Pandavas joined up and began to harass Bhagadatta.

In the meantime, Arjuna was doing good work wherever he went. He joined Bheema and Ghatotkacha. Duryodhana sent a big army to combat these heroes. There was another huge slaughter. Bhagadatta with his elephant was working havoc in the army of the Pandavas, and Ghatotkacha with Bheema and Arjuna was doing his bit.

Arjuna had just heard about the death of his son Iravan. He was so unhappy because this war was the cause of the death of so many innocent people. Because of the obstinacy of Duryodhana, a young man who was the only hope of his mother, had to die a pitiable death. It was all so unnecessary. He spoke to Krishna: "This is what my uncle Vidura predicted long ago. He said that there would be an end of the Kauravas and the Pandavas. That was why he tried to prevent this war. Krishna, look on these two armies. They were so huge just a week back. So many innocent people have been killed by the Kauravas and by us. It is better to die a beggar than to kill so many people for the sake of a throne. I hate this war, Krishna.

I can see now why Yudhishthira was prepared to accept five villages. I then thought that it was beneath his dignity to ask a boon of our cousin. But now I realise what a noble motive prompted my brother to ask for peace even at the cost of his self-respect. All this is because of Sakuni, the evil mentor of Duryodhana. If only he had been killed long before he could influence that cousin of ours! I am sorry I have been born a kshatriya. I am murdering so many people for no fault of theirs. But this is not the time to look back. Take my horses towards the army of the Kauravas. Let me do some more killing before the day is done. It is nearing evening".

Bheeshma met Arjuna once again. In the meantime the fight between the Kauravas and Bheema had not abated. Ghatotkacha was still there. Duryodhana sent some more of his brothers to join in the fight. He was also there. Bhagadatta was fighting gloriously with Ghatotkacha. His elephant Supritika was as grand as ever. It would not let the showers of arrows to upset it in any manner. Bheema met the sons of Dhritarashtra again in battle. He began to destroy them one by one. Eight more of them were killed. The army had to retreat. They lost all inclination to fight. Duryodhana was heart-broken. Twenty-four of his brothers had been killed by Bheema. The battle-field was a very depressing sight to either army. It was literally strewn with the bodies of dead people. There was a gruesome spectacle of bodies without heads, heads without bodies, jewelled arms which had been cut off from bodies, arms with swords and arrows and bows and javelins still clasped in them. The bodies of the dead elephants and horses were all over the field.

The sun had set. The terrible day was done. The eighth day of the great war had come to an end. The heroes returned to their camps. The losses on both the sides were heavy. But the Pandavas were gaining. Bheema and Ghatotkacha had worked ruin in the army of the Kauravas, not to speak of Arjuna and Abhimanyu.

Chapter 11

THE NIGHT IN BHEESHMA'S TENT

Duryodhana was extremely unhappy. The only person who could comfort him was Radheya. He went to his dear friend and told him all that he had been suffering for the last eight days. He told him about the death of his twenty-four brothers. He told him about the

dwindling of his army. He complained against the way his grandfather was fighting. Radheya listened to everything. He was a great comfort to the bruised heart of Duryodhana. After a while he said: "Please do not be so unhappy, my dear friend. I am sorry for you. There is nothing in this world that will give me joy except to see the smile on your face. I am prepared to give my life for you. I am grieved to hear about the death of your brothers. It is fate. No one can defy fate. I do not know how I am to comfort you". Duryodhana said: "Drona, Bheeshma, Salya and Kripa: they all refuse to kill the Pandavas. They are destroying the army quite willingly. But that is not enough. Arjuna is destroying our army and Bheeshma is destroying theirs. That is all that has been happening so far. Nothing remarkable has happened. I am quite diffident now, about winning the war. The fact that you are not in the war has a lot to do with this depression of mine. I do not see any way out of this". Radheya said: "Duryodhana, your grandfather is very fond of the Pandavas. He is not strong enough either, to conquer the Pandavas. Please ask him to withdraw from fighting. Ask him to lay down his arms. I will take up my arms to please you. I will bring the smile back to your face. I will kill Arjuna. You must go to your grandfather now and tell him that Radheya will begin fighting if Bheeshma lays down his weapons. Tell him that I will concentrate on the killing of Arjuna who is a favourite of all of them. I will not care about the destruction of the army". Duryodhana was very pleased with the words of Radheya. He decided to visit his grandfather.

Duryodhana went to the tent of his grandfather. He sat near him after saluting him. He said: "Grandfather, I know that you are powerful enough to fight with the gods. I was sure that victory would certainly be mine since I had you to command my army. But my hopes seem to be just dreams. You have not killed even one of the sons of Pandu. I never thought that the war would continue so long. I was sure of its being over in a day. It is all because of your affection for the Pandavas that I am losing. You are destroying their army. I do not want that. I want the death of the Pandavas. Either you are too fond of them to kill them, or you are nursing some grievance against me. I am really very unfortunate. If you do not like this war, let Radheya fight. He will do what is dear to me". Duryodhana sat silent after these words.

Bheeshma was hurt by these cruel words of Duryodhana. He was angry, but he did not speak harshly to Duryodhana. He sat silent for a while. Then he lifted his angry eyes and looked at Duryodhana as though he would burn him up. But his words were gentle. He said: "Duryodhana, why do you do this to me everyday? You are

wounding me with your terrible words. I am performing for you a great sacrifice. The greatest victim in this sacrifice is myself. I am killing myself to please you. And yet you talk like this. Can you not still see that I CANNOT kill the Pandavas? Whether I want to or not, is a different matter. Even if I want to, I cannot kill them. They are invincible. I have told you this again and again. But you cannot understand me. Their friend is Krishna. Protected by HIM who is the Protector of the universe, how can they be killed by you or by me or by Drona or by your friend Radheya? You are foolish. All the reports about Arjuna's prowess and the proofs that you have had, are not enough to make you realise that I am not the person to kill the Pandavas. Tomorrow, in the war, I will fight excellently. I will burn up the army of the Pandavas. I will destroy the army of the Panchalas and the Vrishnis like a forest fire. I will be so terrible tomorrow that the people of the world will talk about it with thrilling words. I can do that and nothing more. Go and sleep". Duryodhana was a bit satisfied, not quite. But he could do nothing. He would have to wait for the death of the Pandavas at the hands of someone else. Who was capable of that except Radheya? And Radheya had refused to fight till the death of Bheeshma. He could not see how his problems were to be solved. It was all so depressing.

Radheya was unhappy too. With the passing of each day, he was nearing the day when he would have to fight with his dear and beloved brothers. He was grateful to Bheeshma for this respite. He had been given time to train his mind not to think of the Pandavas as his brothers. Eight days had passed. Radheya was gradually preparing himself for the dreadful ordeal ahead of him. If Bheeshma did lay down his weapons tomorrow, he would have to fight. He must. Radheya thought of the past so many years when he had been so impatiently waiting for a chance to fight this duel with Arjuna. He now compared it with his unwillingness to enter the battle-field. He was hoping that Bheeshma would continue his leadership. He was not ready yet for the war with his brothers. He was sorry for his friend Duryodhana. He was complaining that Bheeshma, Drona and Kripa with Salya were all fond of the Pandavas and that they refused to kill them. He thought that Radheya was the only one who hated the Pandavas as much as he did. He was wrong. Radheya loved the Pandavas now, with a love greater than the love Bheeshma had for them. But he could not tell anyone about it.

Poor Duryodhana! Radheya knew that the Pandavas could not be killed. But his friend did not know it. He would not believe it even when so many people told him about it. Duryodhana had seen the Viswaroopa of the Lord. But he would not believe that Krishna

was the Lord of the universe. What could anyone do with him? How to tell him that the Lord had taken the side of the Pandavas and they were therefore invincible? Radheya spent the entire night thinking of the past so many events of his life. The end had come. It was all a matter of days. Radheya prayed for strength: strength to withstand the bonds of affection for his brothers: strength to be loyal to Duryodhana who was his only friend. Radheya prayed for his good name and for his death on the field of battle. His eyes could not, would not sleep. So passed the night.

Chapter 12

BHEESHMA—THE FOREST FIRE

The ninth day of the war dawned. Duryodhana was excited since his grandfather had promised to fight his best today. He spoke to Dussasana: "We are sure to win today. Our wish of the last so many years is to be realised. The greatest task for us today is the protection of Bheeshma. You must make arrangements for a team of our heroes to be surrounding Bheeshma all the time. He has said that he will not fight with Sikhandi. Please see to it that he does not come in front of our grandfather. If today is as successful as I am hoping, we need have no worry about the future. Go and see to the arrangements". He looked at the arrangements of the enemies. He said: "Dussasana, the right wheel of the chariot of Arjuna is protected by Uttamaujas and the left wheel is guarded by Yudhamanyu. Arjuna, in his turn, is protecting Sikhandi. You are to take care that Sikhandi does not appear before grandfather". Arjuna in his turn told Dhrishtadyumna: "See to it that in front of Bheeshma is placed the chariot of Sikhandi. I will guard him".

Bheeshma had arranged his army in the vyuha called Sarvatobhadra. It meant 'safe on all sides'. It justified its name. Bheeshma was at the front as usual. He was guarded by Kripa, Kritavarma, Sakuni, Jayadratha, Kambhoja and the sons of Dhritarashtra. The Trigartas were there, arrayed formidably. The Pandavas arranged their army in an equally formidable phalanx. Yudhishthira, Bheema, Nakula, Sahadeva, and the sons of Draupadi were all at the front. Leading the constellation were Arjuna, Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi, Ghatotkacha and Chekitana. Behind them were stationed Abhimanyu, Drupada and the five Kekaya brothers. The fight began. Abhimanyu attacked the army

of Duryodhana. He was bent on destroying everyone. No one was able to prevent him from breaking into the vyuha. The warriors on both sides were so pleased with his excellent methods of fighting. He was like a comet raining fire and brimstone. With his golden bow and his golden jewels which gleamed on his arms and chest he looked like a thunder-cloud. His bow was almost full circle, so incessantly was it bent. It made a halo round his face. Drona and Kripa, with the powerful Aswatthama and Jayadratha, were not able to withstand him. It looked as though there were two Arjunas instead of one. Duryodhana said: "This Abhimanyu is another Arjuna. We have got to do something to stop him". He called Alambusa and asked him to challenge Abhimanyu.

Alambusa went to Abhimanyu and summoned him to a fight. The sons of Draupadi came to the help of Abhimanyu and the six of them defied Alambusa. With his maya, Alambusa caused a darkness to fall on the field. It was the sort of darkness that hit you in the face. Abhimanyu was very angry with Alambusa. He invoked the astra called Surya. It shed a brightness on the field and the darkness lifted suddenly. People were so pleased with the prowess of the young son of Arjuna. All the maya tactics of Alambusa were counteracted by the astras of Abhimanyu. Alambusa abandoned his chariot and went away from the field of battle. Bheeshma now faced Abhimanyu. Abhimanyu, who was a combination of Krishna and Arjuna, was not a bit upset at the onslaught of his great-grandfather. Arjuna joined his son. The brothers of Duryodhana surrounded the old man. The other Pandavas came to the help of Arjuna and Abhimanyu. The fight was wonderful. Kripa was challenged by Satyaki and a duel began. Kripa fell down in his chariot, unable to stand the power of Satyaki's arrows. Aswatthama came to his rescue. Satyaki cut the bow of Aswatthama into two. Taking up another bow, Aswatthama sent arrows which could break up even a mountain: so sharp were they. They made Satyaki faint. But in a moment he recovered from the faint and attacked Aswatthama with renewed vigour. The arrows of Satyaki covered him completely. Drona came to the rescue of his son. It was now a duel between Satyaki and Drona. It looked like the impact of the two planets, Mercury and Venus. Arjuna hurried to the help of his beloved Satyaki.

Arjuna was the favourite pupil of Drona, and Drona was more dear to Arjuna than his own father. But all that had to be forgotten. They fought with intense fury. Duryodhana was afraid to let duels be fought. He despatched Susarma to the spot. Duryodhana was afraid that Dhrishtadyumna would come to the help of Arjuna and it was well known that Dhrishtadyumna was born to kill Drona.

Arjuna's method of fighting brought tears to the eyes of Drona. He was proud of his pupil and he had to fight against him. He cursed himself for having adopted the role and dharma of a kshatriya. Arjuna invoked Vayu and sent the Vayavyastra. There was a terrible gale and it caused terror in the army of the Kauravas. Drona invoked the astra called Saila. It made the gale abate. He smiled at his pupil as if to say: "I had to do it, my child". Arjuna smiled back as if to say: "Yes, I quite see that you had to do it". The Trigartas beat a hasty retreat. Duryodhana, accompanied by most of the Kaurava heroes, went to Bheeshma and supported him in his fight with the other Pandavas. Bheeshma was fighting with Yudhishthira. Bheema grabbed his mace in his hand and tried to hurt Bheeshma. The elephants intervened frantically and lured him away from Bheeshma. It was pleasing to Bheema to kill that army. What was left of the elephant army of Duryodhana had to go away from the vicinity of Bheema.

The Pandavas now saw the fury of Bheeshma. He began to fight like one possessed. They had to just stand and watch. They could do nothing. He was the god of fury. He had decided to work havoc. He set about it systematically. Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi, Virata, Drupada, and the Pandavas were all together trying to ward off his onslaught. But they could do nothing. A thousand arrows were shot at Bheeshma. But nothing happened. Bheema and Satyaki joined the fight. It was futile. The heap of dead bodies grew larger every moment. The field was caught in the grip of a terrible fear. Bheeshma had decided to kill all of them. All the Kauravas were round the Kuru veteran and all the heroes on the other side were round Dhrishtadyumna. It was just a general defence. No duels were fought any more. It was not possible. Arjuna was being harassed continually by the Trigartas. He had to accept their challenge. It was the rule of fighting. No one could refuse a challenge. Bheeshma came to the help of the Trigartas who were faring not too well with Arjuna. Yudhishthira and the twins were trying to baulk the attempts of Bheeshma. But they could do nothing to him. They were able to kill a large portion of the personal army of Duryodhana. A large slice of it was destroyed. Duryodhana was very much upset by this. He went to his uncle Salya and said: "Yudhishthira seems to be as powerful as Bheema or Arjuna. As for Nakula and Sahadeva, they seem to be worthy nephews of a great man like you. Nothing can stop their fury. I want you to go and fight with them". Accordingly Salya came to fight with his nephews and with Yudhishthira who had so much respect for Salya. He was quite unhappy at the trick of fate which made him fight with the Pandavas who were almost his children. They were the sons of his dead sister and he had to fight with them because of

his own foolishness. It was no use blaming fate for this. With a shrug of impatience the grand old uncle of Nakula and Sahadeva went forward to fight.

Bheema came to help Yudhishthira. The four of them were able to defy the team which had Salya as the leader. Bheeshma's fury had not abated. On the contrary, it increased with the heat of the sun. The army of the Pandavas was being destroyed at an alarmingly fast rate. The sight was terrible. Words cannot describe the panic in the heart of everyone. Krishna spoke to Arjuna: "This man has decided to kill everyone except the five sons of Pandu. You have got to save our army. Arjuna, you must remember your words: that, single-handed, you would kill all the foremost fighters on the side of the Kauravas. Now is your chance. Please look at your army. Come, Arjuna. I will take you to your grandfather. Kill him without mercy". Arjuna answered in a listless voice: "Krishna, I do not want to kill all my dear relatives. The kingdom, which we are going to win after this, will be distasteful. I prefer to go to hell than live this life on earth which is worse than hell. Take me to the presence of Bheeshma. I will try to do as you say". Krishna was very angry with Arjuna for his words. The Pandava brothers and the other heroes looked at the chariot of Arjuna and heaved a sigh of relief. Arjuna was the raft which would save them from drowning. Arjuna advanced. With his first arrow he cut the palm tree banner of Bheeshma. The next few arrows broke the bow of Bheeshma. Bheeshma took up another bow and continued to fight. Arjuna broke that bow. Bheeshma was very pleased with the quickness of Arjuna. He said: "Excellent, Arjuna. It is a pleasure to fight with you". The duel was the most wonderful thing that they had all seen so far. But Arjuna was just sending arrows at the old man. They did not hurt him much. Krishna was exasperated at the softness in Arjuna. He could not forgive him this weakness at this critical hour. He saw that every arrow that Bheeshma was sending was taking the life of at least one man. Arjuna, on the other hand, was making his arrows fall as softly as flower petals on the form of Bheeshma. At the rate at which the fight was proceeding, the Pandava army would be destroyed in no time. Krishna watched for a few moments more.

Suddenly he threw the reins of the horses away from his left hand in disgust. He jumped out of his chariot. He had the Chakra in his hand. He went and stood in front of Bheeshma. His face was distorted with anger. Everyone who saw the anger of Krishna shouted: "Bheeshma is killed! Bheeshma is killed!" Bheeshma was quite calm and collected. He smiled at Krishna and said: "Come, my beloved lord, I am happy to see you. I will welcome death at your hands. This is the second time this chance is given to me. I lost it once. I am not going to

let you go without fighting with you. I will be the most fortunate person on this earth if the great Lord Narayana releases me from this world of pain. Come quickly. I am waiting".

It had all happened within the winking of an eyelid. Arjuna was terrified. He fell out of his chariot, and at the feet of Krishna. He could not talk properly. His throat was dry with fear. He just caught the feet of Krishna in his two arms and looked at him with tears in his eyes. Krishna would not look at him. He tried to shake off the hands of Arjuna which were restraining him. He was sighing like a hissing snake. Arjuna spoke at last: "I beg of you not to do this. Please save me from the sin of having made you break your promise. The world will call you a liar if you do this. I will not allow this stain on your pure name. I have now woken up from my dream. I remember all that you told me on the first day of the war. I swear that I will keep my word and kill as I said I would. I swear in the name of Truth and in the name of our friendship that I will not be false to my promise".

Krishna was now pleased. He knew at once that the cloud had lifted from the mind of Arjuna. Now there would be no one like him. But he did not show his pleasure. His face was still as it was before. He looked as sullen as the sky just before the break of thunder-storm. Without speaking a word he quietly got into the chariot and took up the reins. Everyone could see the different Arjuna now. He became more terrible than Bheeshma now. He was intent on just one thing: to prove to Krishna that he was able to do what he had promised to do. Still Bheeshma was invincible. No one could prevent him from the work of destruction on which he was bent. It went on for a long time. Arjuna could destroy the Kaurava army in return. But he could not stop the old man from the fury of destruction.

Evening had set in. The fighting had to be stopped. The sun had set on the ninth day of the war. It was the most terrible day of all. There was nothing to talk about except the fury of Bheeshma. Everything else paled into insignificance. The Pandavas were just terrified, for the first time in their lives. This was something they had not thought possible. They had no hopes of winning the war: not with Bheeshma fighting like this. The Pandava camp was silent today. No conchs were blown. No trumpets announced their happiness. They were all sunk in gloom: in the darkest depths of despair.

Chapter 13

THE PANDAVAS AT THE FEET OF BHEESHMA

Yudhishthira was speechless with sorrow. He was helpless against the fury of Bheeshma. He looked at Krishna and said: "Krishna, I am sure we will never be able to win this war. Look at Bheeshma. It is impossible to fight with him. We have been trying for the last nine days to stop him. But it is not possible. I can see my army melting away at the approach of Bheeshma, and I am not able to do anything about it. You must tell me what should be done. I find it hard to fight with my grandfather. It is easier to fight with Indra with his weapon Vajra. It is easier to fight with Varuna with his Noose. It is easier to fight with Kubera with his Mace. It is easier even to fight with Yama and his Gada. But I cannot face my grandfather and his snake-like arrows. They burn up my army, and I am helpless. I feel that the only thing to do is to accept defeat and go back to the forest. Anyone who advances towards the Kuru commander suffers the fate of the moth which flies towards a flame. I have been the cause of so much unhappiness to my brothers. Because of my foolishness they had to spend years in the forest. Now, because of my foolishness, they have to suffer the arrows of my grandfather. I look to you for salvation. Krishna, you must save me and this poor army of mine from Bheeshma. Tell me now to kill him". Krishna was full of compassion for Yudhishthira. He was very gentle in his speech.

Krishna said: "Yudhishthira, please do not give way to despair. You have your brothers. You have me. *They* may be overcome by affection for Bheeshma. But *I* will not be affected. I will challenge him. Even under the eyes of the sons of Dhritarashtra I will kill him single-handed. Once Bheeshma is killed, victory is yours. I will be the death of Bheeshma. See me tomorrow. I will kill him using my astras. The enemies of the Pandavas are the enemies of Krishna. Those who are your friends are mine too. As for this dear brother of yours, this Arjuna, he is my dearest friend. I am prepared to cut up my flesh into little bits and give it to him. I am so fond of him. He too is just as fond of me. He will give up his life for my sake. Appoint me as the killer of Bheeshma. Once Arjuna swore that he would kill the great Bheeshma. He sent a message to Duryodhana through Uluka, you remember? In the presence of all the heroes on our side he said that Bheeshma will be his first victim in the war. Loving him as I

do, I cannot make the oath of Arjuna become false. On his behalf I will kill Bheeshma. Let him give me permission and I will do it.

"Or, if he makes up his mind, nothing can stop Arjuna from killing Bheeshma. The whole burden rests on him. There is nothing impossible for this man who has killed Kalakeya and the Nivatakavachas single-handed. Bheeshma is not very hard to kill. Only, Arjuna is too sensitive a soul to do this job. A warrior needs to kill compassion and affection first, if he is to be successful. You are all of you too good to be good killers. I am the right person to do it. It needs a man who is beyond the bonds of this earth. It needs a man who has learnt to treat the opposites, happiness and sorrow, good and bad, pain and pleasure, with equal indifference. I am that man. To me, everything in this world looks alike. To me, the lion and the deer look alike. Good and bad look alike to me. I believe only in the performance of my duty. I do not attach any importance to the results or fruits of my actions. I am, therefore, free from the blame or the credit that goes with the act. Yudhishthira, let me fight. The sin will not cling to me. I am far beyond the touch of these earthly things. Shed all your worry and leave the killing of Bheeshma to me. I will do it for you". Krishna sat silent after that.

Yudhishthira's eyes were full of tears. He took the hand of Krishna in his and said: "Do you have to tell me that you are able to kill Bheeshma? I know you. You are the end and the beginning of the world. You are the cause of the universe. Without you there will be nothing. There will be no sun and no moon and no stars. You are the Eternal Soul. You have taken up the lives of the Pandavas in your hands. I have no words to express my gratitude. You are not the charioteer of Arjuna alone. You are the charioteer to the Pandavas. You have to steer all of us in the right path. You are prepared to do anything for us. But I am not allowing you to get your name tarnished. I do not want you to be called a liar by the world. You are too dear to me. You have promised Duryodhana that you will not fight in this war: that you will be just a charioteer to Arjuna. Please keep that promise. Your hands, white as snow, must not be tainted with blood. I will not have it. I must think of some other way to kill Bheeshma".

A few moments later Yudhishthira said: "On the first day of the war, when I went to Grandfather to get his permission, he told me that he was fighting for Duryodhana because he had to. I am sure that in his heart of hearts grandfather is fond of us. I will go to him and ask him how we are to kill him. Let us all go to him tonight. We will ask him how we are to kill him. Krishna, if you think that my suggestion is good we will adopt it". Krishna said: "I like your

idea. Asked by you, Bheeshma will certainly tell you how he should be killed. Come, let us go". The five brothers and Krishna set out late in the night to the camp of the Kauravas. They discarded their armours and they walked with bare feet.

It was a dark and terrible night. The camp of Duryodhana was silent. Everyone was asleep. The Pandavas entered the tent of Bheeshma. They prostrated before him. Bheeshma was very excited to see these grandchildren of his. He said: "Come, Krishna, I am so happy to see you. Yudhishthira, Bheema, I am happy to see you. It is good to see Arjuna and the handsome Nakula. Sahadeva, how are you, my child? Arjuna, let me congratulate you on your wonderful fighting. Your son is equally wonderful, if not more. You are very fortunate. And now, what can I do for you? What brought you all here in the middle of the night, on foot, without your armours? Tell me what you want me to do".

Yudhishthira was very sad. He looked at the grand old man and said: "My lord, how can we win this war? You said that victory would be ours. You are there on the field sitting in your silver chariot with your bow bent full circle. You are like a forest fire. You are destroying my army. I can see your arrows raining on us like rain drops from a dark rain cloud. How can we win when you are set on killing all of us? I am here to ask you something which I hate to ask". Yudhishthira could not speak. His tears were choking him. Bheeshma put his hand on the bent head of Yudhishthira. He passed his old gnarled fingers along his back with great love and tenderness. He said: "Tell me, my child. Ask anything of me. If I can help, I will certainly do it".

Yudhishthira said: "My lord, unless you are killed we cannot win. I have to ask you how we should kill you. I hate this war. I am sorry I was born a kshatriya. I have to win this war. I have got to see you killed. I must know how we must set about it". Sobs racked his frame. He could not say anything more. Bheeshma smiled at all of them. Still he kept on stroking Yudhishthira. He said: "You are right. As long as I am alive, there is no chance of your winning. If you are able to kill Bheeshma, victory is yours. You must kill me at once". Yudhishthira said: "I hate to think of you as dead. You are so dear to us. I am so unhappy. I cannot think at all. Can we not win the war without killing you? Is there no other way?" Bheeshma said: "No, my child. There is no other way. But let me assure you, I will be happy to die. I am too powerful to die. I cannot be killed even by Indra. I hate this invincibility of mine. My child, if only you knew how much I am longing for death! I hate this life of mine. I have not been happy. I want death. Yes, my child, I want death.

I am pining for death which will be a merciful release for me. But I cannot be killed. I am so eager to die. I am very grateful to you for asking me how you can kill me".

They were listening to his words, as though they were under a spell. He continued: "There are only two people who can kill me. One is Krishna and the other is Arjuna". Bheeshma took Arjuna on his lap and said: "My child, kill me tomorrow. I am so tired. You say you love me. If you do really love me please kill me and give me the peace I have been longing for". Arjuna buried his face in the magnificent chest of his grandfather. He was once again the child who had come to Hastinapura seventeen days after the death of their father. They were once again the helpless children who had come to find love and care from the Kuru elders. Bheeshma said: "No one can kill me when I am fighting. If you find me laying down my weapons, you can kill me. If you bring Sikhandi in front of me tomorrow, I will lay down my bow. I will not fight with him since he was once a woman. I have sworn not to fight with a woman, with a man who was once a woman, or with a man whose name is feminine. This Sikhandi was Amba in his previous birth. Amba was the daughter of the king of Kasi. She was the sister of Ambika and Ambaalika, your grandmothers". Bheeshma began to tell them the tragic story of Amba. He told them about her penance and her being born as the son of Drupada because of the boon of Sankara.

The Pandavas were listening with bated breath. They knew vaguely that Sikhandi had been born to kill Bheeshma, even as Dhrishtadyumna had been born to kill Drona. But this story of the long ago, the story of the woman who loved Bheeshma so passionately that she was ready to kill him to free him from his oath, the woman whose deep love looked like deadly hatred to the world of ordinary men, the woman who had the power to remember her previous birth, the woman who was the one person who understood the heart of this mighty man, this story made them humble. It was so sacred that they could not look at the great Bheeshma with the reminiscent look in his eyes. They were silent in the presence of that suffering.

Bheeshma said: "Amba hates me. I can think of her only as Amba and not as a man, Sikhandi. Amba hates me. But love and hate have but a shifting connotation. A slight change in the point of view, and they are the same. She is the one person who will grant me release from this bondage of life which has been imposed on me. This burden of life can be thrown away only with the help of Amba. Do not have any misgivings. Place Amba in front of my chariot. Looking at her eyes spitting hatred, I will lay down my arms. Arjuna, you must stand behind Amba. You must kill me with your arrows.

I can be killed only by you. I assure you, by blessings will rain on you once this is done by you. I will be killed and then victory is yours. Go home, my children, and sleep without any worry. I will sleep too, tonight. I have not had any sleep for this many a day. I thank you all for letting me sleep with joy in my heart".

Bheeshma was shedding tears of joy. The Pandavas were chastened by the tears of Bheeshma. They fell at his feet and, with their eyes wet and their heads hung down, they left the presence of Bheeshma. They saw him seated, with a strange unearthly smile on his lips. He looked as though he had already begun his journey to heaven. He looked like a god who was just resting for a few moments on the earth. He suddenly looked young and happy. Krishna smiled back at him and said: "You will be happy from now on. You will not be born again in this world of men. You will be remembered as the greatest man that ever graced the House of the Kurus". Bheeshma smiled his thanks for these words of Krishna. So they left him.

The Pandavas reached their camp. With his voice choked with emotion, Arjuna said: "Krishna, how can I do it? I think of the old days when we were children. I would be full of dust and mud because of my playing in the mud. I would go to grandfather and rush to his lap. With his white dress soiled by me, he would laugh with me and play with me. I would sit on his lap and call him 'father'. He would smile gently and say: 'I am not your father. I am your grandfather. Say it: G-r-a-n-d-f-a-t-h-e-r. I would say 'grandfather' and he would hug me tight. I remember this when I think of tomorrow. How can I kill this beloved grandfather of ours? How can I enjoy victory which will be a result of this?" Krishna's face was grave. He said: "You have to do it. You are a kshatriya. You have to win this war. These things will happen. You must be firm about this. Do not let these things upset you. It has been destined that Bheeshma is to be killed by Arjuna. When a man is born the gods decide his death too. It is not in your hands or mine to change the workings of fate. Treat it as your duty and do it. Do not let your affections cloud your mind". Arjuna said: "Yes. I will do it. I will do my duty".

Chapter 14

SIKHANDI IN THE FOREFRONT

The morning of the tenth day of the great war dawned. It was a happy day for Bheeshma. He was to die that day. Arjuna was very unhappy. But he had decided on the course of action. Krishna saw that he was quite firm and he was glad about it. Arjuna said: "I am definite about what should be done today. Krishna, for the last few days, whenever Sikhandi came to the presence of Bheeshma, Grandfather has always avoided fighting with him. So today I will do what Grandfather asked me to do. I will get Sikhandi to stand in front of Bheeshma's chariot. I will then kill Grandfather. I will protect Sikhandi from the onslaught of the other Kauravas. They will all be there to kill him since our Grandfather has told them that he will not fight with Sikhandi and that he is to be the death of Bheeshma. It is well known that Sikhandi is meant to kill Bheeshma".

The Pandavas made Sikhandi lead the warriors to the front. The Kaurava army was arranged in the Asura vyuha and the Pandava army was arranged in the Deva vyuha. In the forefront was Sikhandi. His chariot wheels were protected by Bheema and Arjuna. Behind him were Abhimanyu and the grandchildren of Drupada. Satyaki and Dhrishtadyumna were with them. Yudhishthira and the twins were behind them. The rest of the army was in the charge of Virata and Drupada. They had with them the Kekaya brothers, the powerful Ghatotkacha and Dhrishtaketu. All were ready for the great encounter. The Pandavas decided that Bheeshma should die that day.

The Kaurava army was led by Bheeshma as was the custom. Duryodhana and his brothers were very near the commander. Drona was very near Bheeshma: also Aswatthama, the great Bhagadatta, Kritavarma and Kripa. Behind these were Sakuni and the king of the Kambhojas, and behind them, the reputed Trigarta brothers.

The arrows began to pour out of the bow of Bheeshma. Bheeshma was fighting hard. He was superb. Nakula was in excellent form. With Satyaki and Sahadeva he was doing good work. Bheeshma's anger began to rise. He began his work of destruction. The Kauravas were speechless with wonder and admiration for Bheeshma. Duryodhana's happiness was great. He found his grandfather more powerful today than on all the other days. He looked so young and there was a glow of happiness on the brow of the old war veteran. It seemed to Duryodhana as though his grandfather was happier today than he

had been all these days. It was ages since he had seen this expression on the face of Bheeshma.

Sikhandi accosted Bheeshma. He challenged Bheeshma. Bheeshma sneered at him. He said: "You may be a man now. You may be a great fighter. But to me, you are a woman. I will not fight with a woman. I will not accept your challenge. I do not like the very thought of fighting with a woman. It is beneath my dignity". Sikhandi was furious. He said: "I know that you are the greatest of all archers. I know that you fought with the great Bhargava: you preferred to fight with him rather than accept the love of Amba. I have heard all about you. Still, knowing all about you, I have dared to challenge you. I want to please the Pandavas. I want to please myself. Nothing will please me more than this duel with you. I have prayed for it. I have waited for this for a long number of years. I have decided to kill you. I will kill you".

Sikhandi sent five sharp arrows at Bheeshma and hurt him. Perhaps in her mind, Amba thought of the five arrows of God of Love when she sent those five arrows towards Bheeshma. Perhaps. Arjuna came to Sikhandi and said: "I do not think it will be possible for you to fight with this man since he refuses to accept your challenge. You must keep on harassing him. Never leave his presence. I will be by your side. I see all the heroes of the Kaurava army rushing towards us. I will tackle all of them with the help of my brothers and Satyaki. I will have Abhimanyu, Dhrishtadyumna, Drupada and Virata. There is Ghatotkacha and the Kekaya brothers who are good fighters. I will manage to keep the Kaurava army from advancing too near us".

The Kauravas sensed the danger that was threatening Bheeshma. They saw Bheeshma fighting furiously and they saw the Pandavas all surrounding Sikhandi. Duryodhana said: "We have to guard Grandfather very carefully today. Dussasana, see that all our men have but one aim: the protection of the commander". He went to Bheeshma and said: "Look at our army being burnt up by Arjuna and his powerful son Abhimanyu. Bheema is working furiously. You are the only hope I have. You must save our army from these men. I am afraid they will destroy half the army before evening falls, if you do not kill the hated Pandavas". Bheeshma turned disgusted eyes in his direction. He said: "Even at the beginning of the war I told you that I will not kill the Pandavas. I told you that I would destroy the army of the Pandavas at the rate of ten thousand a day. I have finished that number. I do not like to do more. As for your constant nagging about the Pandavas, I am telling you for the last time that I cannot kill them. I will be killed by Arjuna, but I cannot kill Arjuna. The Pandavas cannot be killed even by the gods. Why then talk of mortal

men like me? Today I will clear all the debts I owe you and your father. I will die on the battle-field today. You can be sure of that". Bheeshma turned his chariot towards the Pandava army and began his work of destruction.

Dhrishtadyumna and Abhimanyu attacked Bheeshma. So did the others: Nakula, Sahadeva, Yudhishthira and Kuntibhoja. These men were stopped in their attempts by the Kaurava warriors. Chitrasena was facing Chekitana. Kritavarma attacked Dhrishtadyumna. The old warrior Bhoorisravas was bent on stopping Bheema from nearing Bheeshma. Vikarna met Nakula and Kripa was fighting against Sahadeva. Durmukha was fighting with Ghatotkacha. Alambusa was, as usual, fighting with Satyaki. The king of the Kambhojas was facing Abhimanyu, and Aswatthama was facing Virata and Drupada. Drona was trying to stop Yudhishthira. Arjuna was facing Dussasana. The army on either side was making for the chariot of Bheeshma. It was the only thing that mattered to them both. There was terrible fighting on the field that day. The duel between Arjuna and Dussasana was wonderful: so much so that people paused in their fights to watch them. The fight between Satyaki and Alambusa was awful since Alambusa had taken to his maya tactics and Satyaki had to ward him off with his astras. Bhagadatta came to the help of Alambusa. Satyaki left the rakshasa and began to concentrate on Bhagadatta. It was not easy to ward off the arrows and javelins which Bhagadatta was sending from the top of his elephant. Duryodhana said to those around him: "Please go and help Bhagadatta and kill Satyaki who is one of the best heroes on the side of the Pandavas. If he is killed, victory is ours". Several of them went towards Satyaki. But he was too good for them. Abhimanyu was fighting with the king of the Kambhojas. The fight between Kripa and Sahadeva was one of the high-lights of the day. Sahadeva was proving to be too powerful for his guru.

Aswatthama was by the side of his father. Drona said: "I have strange forebodings. The omens do not speak well for the side of the Kauravas. I have a feeling that some dreadful calamity will befall them today. I have been watching Arjuna. He seems to be bent on stationing Sikhandi in front of the commander's chariot and he is protecting him. My frame is trembling with an unknown fear and my mouth is dry. This combination of Bheema, Arjuna and Sikhandi in the van of the army makes me feel worried about the welfare of Bheeshma. The indications are strong that Arjuna will kill Bheeshma today. I feel it. I have never seen so much anger on the brow of Yudhishthira till now. I can see that they are all determined to kill Bheeshma. Please go immediately and ward off the arrows of Arjuna which are aimed at Bheeshma. He must be saved at any cost. Let us not think

of our lives and our comforts. Let us do our duty towards the kings who have sheltered us all these years. Arjuna is invincible. Look at the way they have all hemmed in the commander on all sides: Satyaki, Abhimanyu, Dhrishtadyumna, Bheema, Nakula and Sahadeva. Go and prevent the Pandavas from surrounding Bheeshma. He must be saved". Aswatthama hurried to the spot.

Chapter 15

THE FALL OF BHEESHMA

Suddenly Bheeshma became disgusted with the war and the long, long chain of killing. He became disgusted with himself and his cruelty towards the innocent army. He spoke to Yudhishthira: "My child, I have lost all desire to live. Please make haste and grant me release from this body. It will please me so much if you hasten". Bheeshma continued to fight. Yudhishthira asked his brothers to make Sikhandi face Bheeshma once again. Arjuna knew that the most difficult task lay ahead of him now. He had to keep the entire Kaurava army away from the chariot of Bheeshma. All the men were around Bheeshma. Arjuna fought as he had never fought before. He had to rout Aswatthama, the Trigartas, the brothers of the king, Salya and so many others led by Kripa and Drona. Bheema and his dear Satyaki, Dhrishtadyumna and Abhimanyu were there. All of them fought desperately and began to scatter the crowd around Bheeshma's chariot.

There was a moment when the neighbourhood of the silver chariot was empty. It was just a moment. Krishna saw it and said: "Arjuna, it is clear that the moment has come. We must hurry to the presence of Bheeshma with Sikhandi". They went fast. The other Pandava heroes surrounded the chariot of Bheeshma. Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki and the young Abhimanyu were stationed to ward off the approach of the Kaurava warriors. Drona had been caught up in the rear of the army. Sikhandi faced Bheeshma. Arjuna was just behind Sikhandi. Bheeshma saw them all there.

Bheeshma saw the five sons of Pandu: the children whom Dhritarashtra had wronged ever since they were born. He looked at the noble Yudhishthira who preferred five small villages to this war. He saw Bheema with his body thin and weak because of the many years of exile. He saw the motherless children, Nakula and Sahadeva. In his mind's eye Bheeshma saw Kunti with her sad eyes. He thought

of all the sufferings of these six and of Draupadi, the daughter of fire. He thought of the scene in the court of Hastinapura fourteen years back when Draupadi came to him and said: "You are the eldest and the wisest here. How can you allow this injustice? Can you not speak a word in my defence?" Bheeshma thought of himself and his indifferent attitude. Finally, he looked at the chariot of Arjuna and at the Charioteer, Krishna. Bheeshma spoke to himself: "I can kill all these men in no time but for the fact that they are protected by Krishna, the Lord of the universe. I have no right to think of the death of the Pandavas. I have caused enough havoc in their army. I have cleared the debt I owed to Duryodhana. I am sick of killing".

Bheeshma thought of the day when he brought Satyavati to his father in his chariot. His father said: "I grant you a boon. You can hold death at arm's length. You can die when you please". Bheeshma now turned his eyes on Amba. He thought of the day when she looked at him with her eyes full of pleading and said: "You took me by my right hand and placed me in your chariot. You are, therefore, my husband. Please accept me. Do not ruin my womanhood". Bheeshma spoke to himself: "I can die when I please. I have decided. I want to die. I will welcome death now, at this very moment". The gods who had assembled in the sky heard his inner voice. They seemed to say: "Your decision is right. Devavrata, you are doing right". There suddenly blew the sweetest breeze on Bheeshma. It was like the tender caress of his mother's hands. It seemed to say: "Come, my child. Come, my son. You are tired. Turn your face away from this war. I will take you with me. I will cool your limbs in the waters of the heavenly Ganga. I will comfort you. Come".

Krishna had been watching the face of Bheeshma. He saw him now. He knew that the moment had come. He said: "NOW. We must hurry. Sikhandi, get ready. Bheeshma is ready to die". Sikhandi began to shoot his arrows at Bheeshma. Bheeshma would not fight back. With lips sternly compressed, lest his sobs should escape, Arjuna shot arrow after arrow at the old man who was standing in the chariot with his bow and arrow abandoned. Arjuna hated himself. Yudhishthira could not see because of the tears that blinded him. The body of Bheeshma was bristling with arrows. He tried to throw an immense javelin at Arjuna. But Arjuna cut it into pieces. The arrows were still coming from the Gandiva. Still the old man stood still, and still the arrows came. Dussasana was by the side of Bheeshma. He said: "Look, Dussasana, these arrows are not those of Sikhandi. They are the arrows of Arjuna. No one can kill me except Arjuna. He is the one person who is more powerful than me. Look at these arrows. They are all Arjuna's arrows. You can see his name on each one of

them". Bheeshma was feeling happy and pleased that he had been hurt by Arjuna and by no one else. He was so proud. All the heroes were looking on. Duryodhana was helpless and so were the others. There was no sound on the field. Absolute silence reigned. The drums were silent. The trumpets did not dare to whisper even. There was a hush on the army at that moment. Everyone was intent on watching that immense drama that was being enacted. The sun was nearing the west. He was still glowing in the sky even like Bheeshma with the thousand arrows of Arjuna.

With his body torn to shreds by Arjuna, with his face lit up by a smile of excessive beauty, with his eyes resting lovingly on the face of Krishna, the great Bheeshma fell from his chariot. Looking at the fallen ancient of the House of Kurus, the heart of the Kauravas broke. There arose from the heroes a wail which resounded in all the four quarters. It reached the sky and it sounded as though mother earth was crying out in pain because of the fall of this greatest of great men, this hero of the Kuru House.

Bheeshma did not fall on the ground. He fell on a bed of arrows. It was a bed fitting to the great hero. At his fall the sky sent a shower of rain. Already he looked like one who was not of this world. As he was lying on the ground Bheeshma heard divine voices saying: "The son of Ganga is the greatest of men. How is it that he fell at a time when the sun is proceeding towards the south in his path along the ecliptic? It is now Dakshinayana and it is not a good time to die". Bheeshma smiled faintly and spoke. He said: "Devavrata is fallen. But he is not dead. I will keep my life from leaving this body until Uttarayana comes: until the sun's chariot is turned towards the north in his course in the path of heaven. I will not die before that". Ganga, his mother, sent the rishis from heaven to welcome him. They came in the form of swans. They came and they circled round him. They waited for the fallen giant to speak. He told them about his decision to wait for the coming of Uttarayana and said: "Please be good enough to convey the message to my mother that I must do this if I am to resume my previous form". The swans vanished from the sight of men.

The fall of Bheeshma paralysed everyone. The sons of Dhritarashtra were too stunned even to speak. They wept like children. The thought that the immortal Bheeshma was now no more was a thought that froze the blood in their veins. It was something they could never imagine. Several of them had fallen down in a faint. In the midst of this unrest Bheeshma was lying with his eyes closed, preparing himself for the end. The Pandavas and the Kauravas were all standing round him with their heads hung down and with their eyes full of

tears. It was pathetic to see Duryodhana. He looked so dreadfully unhappy. He could do nothing. He could say nothing. He just stood near his grandfather, looking at him all the while. Dussasana had gone to the rear of the army as soon as the great man fell. He went to Drona and he saw Drona's chariot coming towards the front of the army. Drona was coming to the defence of Bheeshma. The king's brother was going at a fast rate. Drona stopped his chariot and waited for the coming of Dussasana. The prince broke the news to Drona. The acharya was not prepared for the shock. He fainted away in his chariot. He had to be revived. He regained his consciousness and the first thing he did was to recall the troops from the field. The paralysed army now began to move slowly towards the camps.

Warriors from either side began to arrive to the side of Bheeshma. They came one by one. With their feet bare, with their armours laid aside, clad in just ordinary clothes, with their chests covered by the thinnest of upper clothes, the heroes came and stood by the side of Bheeshma. They looked like Devas standing in the presence of the Creator Brahma. The Pandavas and the Kauravas were there, sharing the same grief.

Bheeshma spoke to all of them. He welcomed them and began to talk. Just before he began to speak he said: "My head is hurting me. I want a pillow". Everyone who was near hurried out and each brought a pillow. Some were of silk and some were embroidered. In short, they were all pillows fit for the head of a prince. But it annoyed Bheeshma to see all of them. He said: "These pillows are for sleeping at home. But they are not the fitting pillows for one who has fallen on the battle-field. Arjuna, consider well and give me a proper pillow". Arjuna got up and saluted his grandfather. With his eyes full of tears he said: "I will do it". He took up his bow and shot three powerful arrows into the ground near the head of Bheeshma. He placed the head of the wounded man on the pillow of arrows. Bheeshma smiled with great difficulty and said: "Now the pillow is the correct companion for my bed. It is the rule that a kshatriya should have a bed of arrows and nothing else". Bheeshma was very tired. He paused for a moment and spoke again. He said: "My dearest children, I have fallen. I will wait for the coming of the holy Uttarayana, and then my breath will leave my body like a friend taking leave of his heart's dearest friend. Please make arrangements for a ditch to be dug round me so that I can worship the sun undisturbed".

Several physicians came to his presence at the command of Duryodhana. They came to remove the arrows from his body and to apply ointments to the wounds. Looking at them and at Duryodhana,

Bheeshma said: "My child, send them all away after rewarding them properly. I do not need these ministrations. I have fallen as a kshatriya should. I am lying on a bed of arrows. These arrows must remain in my body, and when I am burnt they should be burnt with me". He was too tired to talk anymore. The heroes who had assembled around him retired one by one, to their tents.

Night had fallen. Duryodhana was sitting by the side of his grandfather. Bheeshma was suffering intensely because of the many hurts he had had. A thirst, an unquenchable thirst was torturing him. He said that he was thirsty. Duryodhana brought him sweet water and syrups and wines from his tent. But Bheeshma refused it all and said: "Send for Arjuna. I want to see Arjuna". Arjuna was sent for. The Pandavas hurried to the side of Bheeshma. Bheeshma smiled with great difficulty and said: "Arjuna, my child, I am thirsty. You are the only person who can satisfy my thirst". Arjuna saluted him. He went and brought his Gandiva. Arjuna invoked Parjanya and shot an arrow into the ground very near the head of Bheeshma. The earth opened up and a fountain of sweet clear water rose up. It had the sweetness and the perfume of Amrita, the nectar of the gods. It was Ganga who came to quench the thirst of her beloved child.

Bheeshma looked at all his grandchildren and said: "Only Arjuna and Krishna know this incantation. They are Nara and Narayana. Duryodhana, my child, now that I have fallen, you have no chance of winning the war. Please listen to me. Let all this enmity end with my death. I have told you it is not possible to defeat the Pandavas. I have not been defeated even by my guru Bhargava: and this Arjuna has killed me. If this war is not stopped now, you will all die: perish. Please listen to me. Do as I say. Stop this war". Duryodhana sat silent.

Bheeshma knew that his words of advice fell on deaf ears. They were all there for a while. Seeing that Bheeshma was suffering intense pain, all of them left his presence one by one, after saluting him and taking the dust of his feet. Bheeshma closed his eyes and his mind was set firmly towards the higher world. He forgot the earth and all the miseries of this world.

Chapter 16

RADHEYA AND BHEESHMA

Radheya was stunned when he heard that Bheeshma had fallen. He was sitting in his tent. He looked like one on whom a thunderbolt had fallen. He could do nothing. He could speak no words. Words would not come. To him, sitting alone in his tent, came Duryodhana. The two friends embraced each other. Till now Duryodhana was stunned. He could not cry. But now, at the sight of his friend, at the touch of his hands, his sorrow broke out. He sobbed into the bosom of Radheya. He cried and then he stopped. It looked as though there were no more tears to shed. He was limp with the great shock. Radheya tried his best to comfort him. It was all to no purpose. Radheya made the unfortunate king to lie down on his own bed and soothed him with loving words. Kind nature took pity on the poor unfortunate Duryodhana. His eyes closed slowly and he slept.

Radheya was sitting by his side looking at the form of his dear friend, the friend to whom he had given his heart and everything that was dear to him. His life was to be given up in a few days for the sake of this man, this Duryodhana who meant everything to him. He had no regrets. These few moments with Duryodhana gave him enough strength to face the Pandavas the next day in battle. Yes, tomorrow he would have to meet his dear brothers on the field of battle.

So he sat for a long time. After a while he got up. The night was no longer young. He could go now to Bheeshma. There was silence everywhere. Not a soul was awake. Shocked as they were by the fall of Bheeshma, the Kauravas were all sleeping the sleep of sheer exhaustion. Radheya hurried with quick and silent steps towards the place on the field where the Kuru ancient had fallen. His mind was in a turmoil. He was nervous about going to Bheeshma: Bheeshma had never liked him. In fact, he disliked him. With this in his mind Radheya walked slowly and with great hesitation towards Bheeshma. He came near the great man. He saw him lying on a bed of arrows. His body was full of arrows. His eyes were closed. Radheya looked at him for a moment. He thought that his heart would break. This man, this great Bheeshma, had been killed by Arjuna. And he was his kinsman too. Bheeshma was his grandfather too. With tears choking him he fell at the feet of the great man and held his feet in his hands. Bheeshma opened his eyes. He said: "Who is it? Whose tears are burning me more than these arrows? Who are you child, that

sheds such hot tears of anguish on my feet? Who are you that is so upset by the sight of me that words refuse to come to your lips? Come near me. I cannot see you. It is dark and my head is hurting me so. I am not able to turn it".

Radheya sobbed out: "My lord, I am Radheya. I am the unfortunate Radheya who has never had the good fortune to be liked by you. I have come to pay my respects to you. I would have come earlier but, my lord, I was afraid of being hurt by your words in the presence of others. Hence I waited for night to fall before I could venture into your presence". The eyes of Bheeshma filled with tears. He raised his eyelids slowly and looked at Radheya with affection. He called him to his side and he embraced him as a father would his beloved son. He said: "No, my child. You are wrong. I have never once disliked you. How could I, knowing that you are my grandson?" Radheya said: "Yes, my lord, I have been told that you are my grandfather: that I am the son of Kunti and that the Pandavas are my brothers. I was told all this by Krishna when he came to Hastinapura. But how did you know?"

Bheeshma said: "I knew about it long ago. Vyaasa told me. But it had to be a secret and my lips were sealed and those of Vidura too. I was in the habit of decrying you. But that was because I did not want your pride to blind you. That was the reason why I dampened your enthusiasm in the court of Hastinapura many times. You would talk badly of the sons of Pandu even though they did you no wrong. That was displeasing to me. In the court of the Kauravas I would hurt you with my words. It is true. But that was because I was fond of the Pandavas. I do not dislike you. Please believe me, Radheya. I love you as much as I love Duryodhana. If it had not been for your friendship, Duryodhana would not have thought of this enmity with the Pandavas. That was the reason why I would talk to you so harshly in those days. Please forgive me for that. I know your valour. I know that you are invincible. I know about your generosity. I know that you are the greatest of all givers. There is no one to equal you in archery. You are the equal of Arjuna and Krishna. I know how you went and fought with the king of Kasi single-handed and won a bride for the Kuru Prince even as I did in those days of the long ago! I know that Jarasandha, who had easily defeated Krishna, could not stand up to you in battle. I am proud to have you as my grandson. You are a great man. You have always been truthful. You are as glorious as the sun. You are no ordinary mortal. You have a god for your father. Fate has never been kind to you. She has deliberately made you suffer. We cannot guess the will of God. The Pandavas are your brothers. I will be happy, so happy, if you go

and join them. If you go, this war will end. Let me be the only one who has been made to die. Let this enmity end with me".

Radheya said: "My dear grandfather, if only it had been possible! If things had been different! But, my lord, things are not what we wish them to be. Once, when Duryodhana and I became friends I had told him: 'I will do anything in the world for you. Even if it seems an impossible task I will be happy to do it and please you'. I want to keep that promise to Duryodhana. I will give my wealth, my wife, my children, my body and this life of mine to Duryodhana. He is the only star in my mental horizon. I will die for him. Duryodhana had nursed this anger against the Pandavas, depending on me and my valour. I cannot let him down. When the gods conspire to ruin a man, what can be done? Nothing. I love the Pandavas and I have to fight them. I must walk to my ruin. I know that we are all going to be destroyed. You have told us and uncle Vidura has been telling us all these days. I have been watching the omens. I have had dreams too. They all point to the same thing: the destruction of the Kauravas. I know the greatness of Krishna. I know that he has already decided the fates of all of us. A kshatriya should not die in his bed. The world may think that I am a sutaputra. But I know and you know that I am not a sutaputra. I am a kshatriya. I am determined to die for my friend Duryodhana. Grandfather, please give me your blessings, I beg you. Please forgive me for all the cruel and harsh words which I have often used against your revered self. The great should forgive the faults of the ignorant".

Bheeshma embraced Radheya and said: "Go, my child. Can a grandfather be angry with his grandson? You and Duryodhana mean the same to me. I bless you. This terrible enmity between the cousins cannot be wiped out by anyone. You have got to fight. I know that. Die in the battle like a great hero and reach the heavens. I will be there too. Do your duty as a kshatriya and die bravely. You will get what you want. Your name will always be remembered by posterity. I will soon join you in heaven. I must wait for the coming of Uttarayana".

Radheya saluted him and said: "Grandfather, I have a boon to ask of you". "What is it?" said Bheeshma. Radheya said: "Please let this be a secret always. Let the secret of my birth die with me". Bheeshma said: "After you have gone, I will tell my Duryodhana about it. Just him, and no one else. He must know the extent of your love for him. But do not be afraid. I will see that he does not tell the Pandavas about it". Radheya stood with folded hands in front of Bheeshma. The old man embraced him again and again and bade him adieu.

Radheya hurried to his tent. He stole in silently. He saw that Duryodhana was still sleeping. He lay down quietly by his side. From the doorway of the tent he could see a star in the black sky. He was staring at it for a long time. His mind had found peace after this talk with Bheeshma. It felt as though a thorn had been removed from his mind. He was happy to know that Bheeshma loved him. His blessings made Radheya look forward to the war. He was happy. Suddenly sleep came to his tired eyes. The two friends slept on the same bed. So they slept till the sun came back to the east to usher in another bloody day.

DRONA PARVA

Chapter 1

RADHEYA ENTERS THE FIELD

The eleventh day of the great war dawned. It was a terrible dawn for the Kauravas. They had lost Bheeshma. Their only hope was gone. The fall of Bheeshma was a calamity, a great calamity. The Kaurava army without Bheeshma was like the sky without the stars: like the heavens without the sun: like the earth without the green: like speech without correct words: like a woman who had lost her lord: like a river dried up during summer months: like a mountain cave without the lion and its roar. The Kauravas were desperate. They all looked to Radheya as their only hope now. The entire host resounded with the words: "Radheya! Radheya is the one person who can kill the Pandavas, now that the great man has fallen". They all went to the tent of Radheya. Radheya was preparing himself for the war. He knew that the time had come for him to keep his promise to Duryodhana. He spoke to himself: "With the fall of Bheeshma all is lost. He was the home of noble qualities. He was firm. He was righteous and he was brave. At the same time he was very modest about his prowess. It was a great fall. This man, in whom all good things were found always, like beauty in the moon, is now fallen. After seeing this, who can be sure of seeing the sun rise in the east tomorrow? Bheeshma, born on this earth for a cause, has fulfilled his mission and is now waiting to go back to the Vasus. It is now the end of the world. The Kauravas have no hope of living. I must be the one to comfort them now". The sons of Dhritarashtra came to his tent and found him grieving for the great Bheeshma. Seeing his grief, their tears flowed anew. They sobbed, and Duryodhana clung to Radheya once again for comfort.

Radheya wept with him. They comforted each other. Radheya said: "In this world, where everything is transcient, we can be sure of nothing. Under the eyes of all the Kaurava heroes, the great Bheeshma has fallen. It is easier to imagine that the sun has fallen from the sky. The unthinkable has become inevitable and it is not right that we should forget ourselves in this difficult situation. Duryodhana, I will fight for you with my life as the stake, and I know that fame is the only lasting thing on this earth where everything else dies. The Pandavas are powerful. Yudhishthira the righteous, Bheema the powerful, Arjuna the invincible, Nakula and Sahadeva, the divine fighters, Satyaki who is the equal of Arjuna and Krishna, Abhimanyu the most powerful of all of them: all these are teamed against us. We will

fight with them to the best of our ability. If we win, the world is yours. If we do not, lasting fame will be ours. Let us not worry about the future. It is all in the laps of the gods. Let us fight". Duryodhana was very happy at the thought of Radheya and Arjuna meeting. He was sure of the death of Arjuna. He left Radheya to his preparations for war and went to his own tent.

Radheya was ready. He went to Bheeshma and stood before him with his palms folded. He said: "My lord, I am Radheya. I am setting out for my first fight with the Pandavas. I have begun the work of sacrifice. I will follow in your footsteps in this work. You have laid down your life for the sake of Duryodhana and I will do what you have done. After your fall, there is no hope for the Kauravas. They will all soon reach the abode of Yama. Arjuna will burn up the entire army in no time. As for Duryodhana, he and his brothers will all be killed by Bheema. With Krishna holding the reins of his white horses, why should Arjuna have any worry? I will go now and do my duty to my friend. Please bless me". Bheeshma took his hand in his and said: "You are the only hope of Duryodhana. Fight your best. You are a great man. Let your death be as great. Go and fight. I will bless you. Yours will be lasting fame. People will remember you long after they have forgotten many things. You have always wanted a good name and an unsullied reputation. They will be yours. You are a kshatriya. Fight as a kshatriya and die as a kshatriya. Let the field of battle be like a mother's lap to you. You will die with a smile on your lips. You will not be born again in this world". Bheeshma placed his hand on the bent head of Radheya and blessed him. Radheya took leave of him. He saluted him and took the dust of his feet. Radheya walked to his chariot. He rode in all splendour towards the Kaurava army. To them who were sunk in gloom, the sight of Radheya was like the rise of the sun after a night of darkness. They all cheered him and shouted: "Radheya! Here is Radheya. We need worry no more about the power of the Pandavas".

Duryodhana welcomed him with smiling eyes. He said: "Radheya, tell me what should be done now. I cannot think for myself. I am waiting for your words of advice. This army has to have a commander now. We had Bheeshma. Who will take up the task now?" Radheya said: "All the heroes who have assembled here for your pleasure are fitted to take up the command. Each will vie with the other in valour and bravery. If you choose one of them all the others will feel offended. It is not right to differentiate between heroes. We must not let anyone be dissatisfied. I feel that your guru, the great Drona, will be the proper person to be the commander of your army.

It is but right that he should succeed the great Bheeshma. There is no one to equal him in archery. He is wise and brave and righteous. He is devoted to you. He will lead your army into the haven of safety. I feel that Drona is the most fit person to command your army".

Duryodhana was pleased with the wisdom of Radheya. He liked his decision. He now approached Drona. He said: "You are the one person, my lord, who has been as near to us as our grandfather. His mantle should rest on your shoulders. You must gladden our heart by doing this for me. You must be our commander. Please accept the leadership of our army". Drona was very pleased with Duryodhana and his humble words. He said: "I am pleased with your words. I accept this honour you have conferred upon me. I will be happy to do this for you. I will lead the army as best as I can". The coronation was performed for Drona. He was formally installed as the commander of the Kaurava army.

The army was excited at the sight of Radheya. They all said: "Radheya can win the war. His valour is superior to that of Arjuna. He will certainly kill all the Pandavas". They forgot the sorrow caused by the fall of Bheeshma. Drona began to arrange his army in the Sakata vyuha. Sakata means a wheel. The vyuha was a circular formation. The Pandava army was again arranged in the Krauncha formation. Radheya appeared at the front of the army. It was wonderful to see him for the first time on the battle-field. He looked as pure and beautiful as the sun just after he had come out of the mouth of Rahu.

Before he came to the front of the army, Drona spoke to Duryodhana. He said: "I want to do some special act for you. I want to please you. What act of mine will please you most?" Duryodhana thought for a moment and said: "If you capture Yudhishthira alive and bring him to me, I will be immensely pleased". Drona said: "I hope you are not planning to kill Yudhishthira. I will not capture him if that is your aim. If you can, kill him on the battle-field, but do not try to kill him by deceitful means. I will not be a party to it". The words of Drona brought a smile to the eyes of Duryodhana. He said: "Please do not be worried. If I do have Yudhishthira killed, the next moment Arjuna will kill all of us. Even if we kill all the Pandavas, Krishna will take up his weapon and destroy us. There is no doubt about it. Neither will I be able to withstand the power of the brothers of Yudhishthira. I know that. I want Yudhishthira to play another game of dice with me. If he is defeated, we can send them all to the forest once again. That is the reason for my request. Bring Yudhishthira to me, alive". Drona thought for a moment. He said: "I can

do it only on one condition. If Arjuna is not there to protect him, you can consider Yudhishthira to be my captive already. But Arjuna cannot be conquered by me. He was once my pupil. But now he is far superior to me. I am afraid of him. If, however, you manage to remove Arjuna from the neighbourhood of Yudhishthira, I can bring him to you as a captive". Duryodhana was satisfied. He would think up means of luring Arjuna away from Yudhishthira. For the moment, the assurance that Drona would bring Yudhishthira to the Kaurava camp as a captive, was more than enough. The spies of the Pandavas hurried to them to tell them about this plan of Duryodhana. Arjuna was very angry with Drona for agreeing to this mean proposal of Duryodhana. He decided not to leave the company of his brother during the war.

Chapter 2

TO CAPTURE YUDHISHTHIRA

The two armies had been arrayed. The fight began. Under the leadership of Drona, the army had assumed a terrible aspect. They could forget Bheeshma in this new excitement. Sahadeva was able to meet Sakuni in a single fight. Drona was accosted by the man who was to be his death: Dhrishtadyumna. Vivimsati, the brother of Duryodhana, tried, for a while, to fight with Bheema, and found that it was not possible. Bheema had killed his horses and he split his chariot into fragments. Vivimsati had to flee from his fury. Bhoorisravas fought with Sikhandi. He was covered by the arrows of Sikhandi. But he staved them off with arrows of his own. It was a good spectacle. The old warrior and the younger man were not satisfied with ordinary fighting. They were causing a great sensation by their duel. Ghatotkacha and Alambusa met in a fierce duel. It was fascinating to see these two. Both were masters in the use of maya tactics and both were using it to the utmost limit. Chekitana met the Avanti brothers Vinda and Anuvinda.

Virata encountered Radheya first. The army stood and watched, with bated breath, this first battle of Radheya. They were amazed to see the dexterity with which he handled the bow, and the quickness of his hand. Abhimanyu fought several duels today. He was in very good form. No one could withstand his arrows. He was making the battle-field glow with his beauty and charm. He was deadly too. It

was a wonderful sight to watch him fight. He fought a duel with Salya. He was too powerful for Salya. In fury, Salya descended from his chariot. With mace uplifted, he approached the young son of Arjuna. Bheema came to the assistance of Abhimanyu. He challenged Salya for a single fight with the mace. They looked like a tiger and an elephant which were about to attack each other. They won approbation from both sides. Both were excellent fighters with the mace and it was a fight of no mean order. Only Bheema had the strength to bear the force of Salya's mace, and only Salya could bear the power of Bheema's mace. It was a wonderful sight. Bheema once hit the mace of Salya, which was flung away from his hand and fell on the ground like a torch. They went on fighting for a long time. But finally Salya was felled by Bheema. Kritavarma came and took away Salya in his chariot.

Vrishasena, the son of Radheya, had come to the front today. He was like a comet which suddenly shoots into the sky illuminating the entire sky and earth with its glow. He was harassing the army of the Pandavas. Sataanika, the son of Nakula, accosted him. He was finding it difficult to tackle him single-handed. The other sons of Draupadi came to his aid. Aswatthama came to the help of Vrishasena. The field that day looked like the end of the world when twelve suns are supposed to shine all together. The many heroes vied with each other in valour, in brilliance, in grace and skill. It was indeed a glorious sight to see so many of them together. But the army of the Kauravas had suffered a great loss. Abhimanyu, Bheema, Satyaki, Dhrishtadyumna and Arjuna had been steadily destroying the army of the Kauravas.

Drona thought that he should now set about the task of capturing Yudhishthira. He saw that Arjuna was not in the neighbourhood of his brother. Drona's chariot came as fast as wind towards the Pandava host. Drona spoke to his charioteer: "There, in the distance, can be seen the white umbrella of Yudhishthira. Our army is being shattered to fragments by the Pandavas. I will now proceed towards Yudhishthira and take him unaware. It is hard to think of fighting with my pupils. They are all of them my pupils: the Pandava brothers, Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi and Satyaki. I have to fight with them all. But this is not the time for all these thoughts. I must hurry before Arjuna comes back". The army of the Pandavas was helpless against the fury of Drona. He was just flitting past them, raining arrows on all sides. He was making straight for the spot where Yudhishthira was. He now attacked Yudhishthira who was taken by surprise. Yudhishthira fought valiantly but he could not resist the onslaught of Drona. Drona cut his bow into two. He was just helpless. Dhrishtadyumna hurried

to the spot to lend assistance to Yudhishthira. He checked the powerful Drona as the land does the sea. The protector of the chariot of Yudhishthira was harassed by Drona. Drona hurt Sikhandi and Uttamaujas with his arrows. The sons of Draupadi were powerless against Drona. Satyaki came up, and Virata too. They were all being defeated by the great Drona. Dhrishtadyumna realised the seriousness of the situation. He was fighting desperately. But an inhuman strength seemed to have come to the arms of Drona. He was just like the god of death. He was terrible. No one could do anything to check his advance. His advance was very fast. Drona was fighting for the sake of his promise to Duryodhana. He had to capture Yudhishthira. The Pandava army led by Dhrishtadyumna was fighting for the life of their king. They were losing. The people around said: "Yudhishthira is sure to become the captive of Drona today. The war will be stopped now. Yudhishthira will go back to the forest with his brothers. Duryodhana will be happy now, and his father too".

There was heard the sound of a quickly approaching chariot. It was the chariot of Arjuna. Krishna was driving the chariot as he had never driven before. They came faster than the wind. On either side of the chariot the dead bodies of the soldiers of Drona could be seen. It looked as though Arjuna was swimming across a river of blood. He now proceeded fast towards the chariot of Drona. The field was dark because of the denseness of the arrows of Arjuna. He routed the army of Drona. He harassed the greatest of all archers, Drona, with his arrows. He was wild with anger against his guru who could consent to do such a heinous thing to please Duryodhana. He could forgive Drona for fighting on the side of the Kauravas. But this promise of his to Duryodhana was unforgivable. It was an act to which he should not have agreed. They were all there when the game of dice was played fourteen years ago. The horror of it could not have left the minds of righteous-minded men. This Duryodhana had planned another game of dice, and this guru of theirs had agreed to be an accomplice to this conspiracy. In that one moment, all the respect Arjuna had for his guru was lost. His mind was shocked and grieved by the behaviour of his guru. Just yesterday grandfather had fallen. And today Duryodhana was up to his mean tricks again. With his eyes raining anger and with his hands perpetually raining arrows against Drona, Arjuna fought furiously with his guru. Drona knew that he was beaten. He had a chance and he had tried to grab it. But he was not quick enough. Arjuna had come to the rescue of Yudhishthira.

The sun had set already. No one noticed it. The two armies were withdrawn. Arjuna's face was still red with anger and indignation. The chariots of the heroes returned to the camps. It was night.

The eleventh day of the war, the first day of the leadership of Drona, was over. It was more a day for the Pandavas in spite of the wonderful feat of Drona. Arjuna had easily outshone his guru.

CHAPTER 3

THE TRIGARTAS

The armies had returned to their tents. In the Kaurava camp Duryodhana was, as usual, dissatisfied with the way things were going. In the presence of everyone he began to show his displeasure. He said to Drona: "My lord, you, of your own accord, offered to do something to please us. We asked you to bring Yudhishthira to us as a captive. You had a chance today. But you did not do it". Drona was upset by the words of Duryodhana. He said: "Of course I promised. But I had also told you that I can do it only if Arjuna is not in the neighbourhood of Yudhishthira. I had almost captured your cousin Yudhishthira today. But Arjuna came there at the critical moment. I could not manage to defeat him. If it is possible to lure away Arjuna from his brother for some time, I will capture Yudhishthira for you".

When these words were spoken, Susarma, the eldest of the Trigarta brothers, said: "We brothers bear a grudge against Arjuna. We hate Arjuna. It will give us great joy to kill him. This grudge we bear him is a very ancient one. I have a feeling that the time has come when we can take revenge on him. All these days, we have been fighting with him but not to my heart's content. The suggestion of the Acharya is pleasing to us. We will challenge Arjuna to fight with us alone. There is no place in this world for the Trigartas *and* Arjuna. Either we kill Arjuna or we will be killed by him. My lord, tomorrow we will challenge him and take him away to the southern side of the field. It is not going to be a short fight. He is powerful and so are we. Before our work is completed, the Acharya can surely capture the eldest of the Pandavas. I am sure this suggestion of mine will be approved by all of you".

The Trigarta brothers were Susarma, Satyaratha, Satyavarma, Satyaasu, and Satyadharma. These brothers now took a terrible oath in front of the blazing fire that they would either kill Arjuna or be killed by him: they would not return from the field of battle without their oath being accomplished. They were called the Samsaptakas since they got bound by an oath.

The morning of the twelfth day of the great war dawned. The army of the Kauravas was arranged in the form of a Garuda, the sacred Eagle. The Pandava army was in the form of a crescent. Early in the morning, the Samsaptakas came to the front and challenged Arjuna. Arjuna was in a fix. He knew that Drona had promised to Duryodhana that he would capture Yudhishthira and surrender him to Duryodhana. He wanted to stay by the side of his brother all the time. Yesterday it was almost a successful attempt on the part of Drona. Arjuna had come just in time to avert the calamity. But now this new complication had set in. It looked as though this was a deliberate manoeuvre. But Arjuna was helpless. It was the rule that a kshatriya should not refuse a challenge. The Trigartas were calling him out to fight. Unless he accepted that he was not able to fight them, he would have to go. Arjuna decided to fight with the Trigartas. He went to Yudhishthira and said: "The Trigartas are challenging me to fight with them. If I do not accept their call, the world will call me a coward. I am not a coward. I cannot refuse their challenge. My dear brother, I hate to leave you and go, but I have got to go. I am bound by the rules of war to go and fight with them".

Yudhishthira said: "My child, you have heard about the promise of Drona to his king Duryodhana. Please make his promise false. You must fight with the Trigartas. I know that. I know that today is the last day in the lives of these terrible brothers. But you must make proper arrangements for my protection. I do not want to be captured". Arjuna said: "Brother, please do not be worried. This Satyajit, the brother of Drupada, will be here to protect you. So long as he is alive, no one can touch you. If, however, he is killed, I ask you as a personal favour to play the coward and run away from the battle-field. You must not allow the terrible Drona to capture you. You must promise me that you will run away if Satyajit is killed". Yudhishthira promised that he would. He blessed Arjuna and sent him to fight with the Trigartas.

Chapter 4

SUPRITIKA, BHAGADATTA'S ELEPHANT

The army of Duryodhana saw the white horses of Arjuna going towards the southern side of the battle-field. They were sure of the success of the plan of Drona. After Arjuna had left, the two armies

clashed with the intention of destroying each other. Arjuna went to the southern side of the field. The Trigartas had arranged their army in the shape of a crescent. Just single-handed, Arjuna had to fight with this huge army. He did not mind it. While the chariot was proceeding towards the Trigartas, Arjuna said to Krishna, with a slight smile on his lips: "Krishna, look at these people who have made up their minds to die today. I am amused to see the Trigartas smiling. They must be weeping. But perhaps, they are smiling because they are going to reach heaven. Considering the fact that they are such sinners, this is the only way they can go to heaven. Or else they can never even get a peep into the realm of Indra. That, perhaps, is making them look so happy. Come, let us hurry. I must finish these people and go back to Yudhishthira". Arjuna took up his Devadatta and blew it lustily. The Trigartas were prepared for his coming.

Their arrows greeted Arjuna. He returned their attack. Susarma and his brothers were fighters of no mean order. Arjuna was, of course, excellent. It was no wonder that the battle went on for a long time. Arjuna and Krishna were literally enveloped by the many arrows from the enemies. Subahu, one of the enemy kings, was now facing Arjuna. He was a very good marksman. Arjuna cut off his bow and then his hand. Then came Susarma and ten great warriors. Arjuna was more than a match for all of them. Sudhanva was the first to be killed. The others followed very soon: all except Susarma. The army became nervous and there was a general scramble towards the main army. Susarma was very angry with them. He said: "You have all sworn that you would win or die. It is not right that you should all run away and face the sneer of all the others". They all came back because they had to. Part of this army was made up of the Narayanas, the cowherds who had been given to Duryodhana by Krishna. They all came back to fight.

Arjuna was slightly irritated by the return of the army. He was hoping that it was the end of the fight. He said: "Krishna, they have decided to die. They are not fond of their lives. I can see that. Watch me kill all of them". Even as he was saying this, Arjuna was caught in a rain of arrows. They were coming so fast and so very thick that he could see nothing. The chariot of Arjuna could not be seen. He was furious. He now thought that the time had come when astras should be used. With his forehead wrinkled up with a beautiful frown, Arjuna blew his Devadatta. He invoked the god Twashtar and sent the astra. It was a wonderful astra. It made the soldiers see thousands of Arjunas and thousands of Krishnas. Each man thought that his neighbour was Arjuna. They were all killing each other. There was a complete massacre of the army of the Trigartas. Those who remained

assaulted Arjuna. They were now being killed by Arjuna in hundreds. But the Trigartas were undaunted. They covered up Arjuna and Krishna with their arrows. The darkness caused great fatigue to Krishna. With his body wet with sweat, Krishna gasped out: "Arjuna, where are you? I cannot see you. I cannot see anything. These arrows are overpowering me. I do not know if you are alive or dead". Arjuna was wild with anger. He invoked the astra called Vayavya. There was then a terrific gale. The cloak of arrows disappeared in a moment. Arjuna and Krishna could now see the army being borne on the field by the gale. The soldiers looked like so many dried leaves being carried away by the breeze. They could not withstand the fury of the astra. Several of the great warriors on the side of the Trigartas were killed by the two astras sent by Arjuna. Arjuna was hoping that he was now free to go back to the spot where Yudhishthira was fighting. Arjuna did not know what havoc had been caused by Drona.

In the meantime the main scene of fight was going on. Even at the beginning Drona advanced towards the spot where Yudhishthira was stationed. His intention was to capture him as soon as he could. He knew that Arjuna was powerful. He did not know how soon he would return from his fight with the Samsaptakas. He therefore hurried to the presence of Yudhishthira. Yudhishthira had Dhrishtadyumna by his side. He said: "We must be careful not to let Drona capture me". The commander of the Pandava army smiled at Yudhishthira. He said: "He might have promised to do so. But, my lord, it is not easy for him to keep up his promise when we are all here to see that his words are just words. Drona, in his desire to please that hateful Duryodhana, has undertaken to do a very mean action. It will not happen. We will punish that man for his unrighteous action".

When Drona, in his desire to capture Yudhishthira, advanced towards the Pandava army, he found that Dhrishtadyumna was already advancing towards him. This made Drona pause for a moment. He was not pleased to meet Dhrishtadyumna who was to be his death. It looked like a bad omen to the superstitious Drona. He avoided him and went forward. He was met by the army of Drupada, which was stationed to protect Yudhishthira. Just to, distract the attention of Dhrishtadyumna, Durmukha, a brother of Duryodhana, came and challenged him. Dhrishtadyumna covered him with his arrows and he tried to fight with Drona at the same time. Durmukha kept on harassing Dhrishtadyumna. It was a good duel. In the darkness that had been caused by the arrows of Durmukha, Drona managed to get past the defence put up by Dhrishtadyumna. He had come very near Yudhishthira. Drona looked like a lion which had come to catch a calf which had been separated from the cow. Satyajit was there defending Yudhishthira.

He attacked Drona. Satyajit had his bow cut up by Drona. He took up another bow and continued to fight. Another brother of Drupada, Vrika by name, came to the help of his brother. Drona harassed them both with his powerful arrows. Drona killed the valiant Vrika. This infuriated Satyajit. He sprang at Drona and killed his charioteer. He cut the bow of Drona into two. Drona cut off the head of Satyajit with an arrow shaped like a half moon.

When they saw Satyajit killed, the Pandava army was shocked. The Kekaya brothers and the other brothers of Drupada came to defend Yudhishthira. Virata was also there. They saw Drona making straight for the chariot of Yudhishthira. Virata's brother, by name Sataanika, came to the front. He tried to prevent Drona from approaching Yudhishthira. He fought well. But Drona cut off his head from his body. Seeing three great heroes killed within a few moments, the Pandava army became panicky. No one could come near the dreadful Drona. The battle-field seemed to be the stage set for the death-dance of the God of Death. Sikhandi, Vasudhana and Satyaki were the next three who came to challenge Drona. But he was undaunted. He was able to send them back with his terrible arrows. They were not arrows. They were like live coals which burnt up anyone who came near. Drona had come very near Yudhishthira. Yudhishthira remembered the instructions of Arjuna. He mounted the fastest horse he could get and rode away from the field.

The Pandava heroes could not help being frightened of Drona. They could not stop his onslaught. He was worse than Bheeshma in his fury. Several of the brothers of Drupada, and Dhrishtadyumna, were there fighting with him. The prince Suchitra fell down dead. All over the field could be heard the shouts: "Kill Drona! Kill the bloodthirsty commander!" But no one could kill him. He routed the entire army. But he had not been able to achieve what he set out to achieve. He could not capture Yudhishthira, in spite of this ruthless killing.

Duryodhana was standing in the middle of the field with Radheya, watching the panic in the army of the Pandavas. Duryodhana was extremely pleased with Drona. He said: "Look, Radheya. Look at the great army of the Pandavas being routed by our acharya. The heroes on their side are not able to meet Drona. I have a feeling that they will never think of war anymore. They are too busy avoiding the arrows of Drona to think of fighting with him again. Look at Bheema. He is not able to meet the acharya. He is realising that our Drona is too much for him. The Pandavas will now give up hopes of living through this day. They will give up all thoughts of the kingdom. I am sure of it". Radheya did not like the speech of the king. He said: "My friend, do not think so lightly of the great Pandavas. They

are not cowards. Nor are they people who will forget the past. They are powerful warriors: they are heroes: they are spirited people. Do you think they will forget the several injustices done to them? Do you think Bheema will forget the poisoned food you gave him when he was a small boy? How can he forget the city called Varanavata? Can he forget the game of dice? Can he forget the thirteen years of suffering that they had to undergo because of you? Please do not lull yourself into a sense of false security, because of the passing success of your guru. They will certainly fight back. They are all not ordinary heroes. Think of Satyaki and Dhrishtadyumna and the Kekaya brothers. Look, my lord, Bheema is coming along with his eyes red like live coals. The other heroes are now following Bheema like a crowd of rain clouds surrounding the sun. I have a feeling that the great acharya is now in a precarious position. It will do well if we go to his assistance. It looks as though he needs it badly".

Duryodhana was slightly disconcerted by the words of Radheya. But he saw the truth of it. With his brothers he went to the help of Drona. Radheya was with them. There was then fought a great fight between the two hosts. Nakula and his brother were burning up the Kaurava army. The sons of Draupadi were in the front causing great destruction. Abhimanyu was as wonderful as ever. The usual duels were fought. The fact, that Yudhishthira had escaped without being captured by Drona, put new life into them. The elephant army of Duryodhana was being destroyed by Bheema as was his custom.

Then came Bhagadatta with his magnificent elephant Supritika. This appearance of Bhagadatta was a terrible thing. His elephant was invincible. It was a great source of danger to the Pandava army. They dreaded the sight of this fine elephant and the equally fine Bhagadatta seated on it like the lord of heavens on his elephant, the Airavata. This elephant seemed to enjoy annoying Bheema. It would always make straight for Bheema and his chariot. It was the same today. It broke the chariot of Bheema into splinters. The army was terrified. Everyone thought that Bheema had been killed by it. Yudhishthira came there with the Panchala army. He was afraid for Bheema. The elephant was now bent on destroying the army. The king of the Dasaarnas brought his elephant. Yudhishthira covered Bhagadatta's elephant and the rider too with many of his sharp arrows. But they fell on them just like rain drops. The fight went on. Bhagadatta now prodded the elephant with his toe. It made straight for the chariot of Satyaki. In a moment the chariot was just a heap of wood and metal. If he had not jumped out in time, Satyaki would have been killed in a matter of moments. The elephant proceeded once again against Bheema who had come again to the front. Bheema was caught

in the trunk of the elephant. The elephant had wound his trunk round the form of Bheema and lifted him up in the air. It would have dashed him to pieces if he had not managed to extricate himself. Bheema got under the elephant. He began to harass it by making it turn round and round. He was standing between its legs and annoying it. The elephant tried to kill Abhimanyu by rushing against his chariot. He saved himself by jumping out nimbly. The army of the Pandavas was held at bay by a single elephant. It was terrible. They could do nothing about it. Bheema had met his match. He could do nothing to this elephant. The sight of Bhagadatta seated on its neck, sending arrows and javelins in all directions, was causing panic in the army. There was terrible shouting of agony from the Pandava army and of joy from the Kaurava army. The noise resounded in all the four quarters.

CHAPTER 5

THE FALL OF BHAGADATTA

Arjuna heard the sound from a distance. He had just routed the Trigarta army with his Vayavyastra. He said: "Krishna, Bhagadatta, the king of Pragjyotisha, has come with his elephant. I can guess that by the deafening noise from the army. That elephant cannot be hurt. Neither can its rider. I think I must go there now. Only you and I know how to tackle this Supritika. Bhagadatta, the friend of my father, Indra, is too sure of himself. I must teach him a lesson. He is a great man. He is an old man. He has won name as one of the noblest of men who have walked the earth. This noble man has taken the side of the Kauravas. I have got to kill him and his elephant. For the last so many days it has done enough mischief. Bheema is unable to do anything to this one elephant. Come, let us go". Krishna turned the chariot.

The moment the chariot was turned, the Trigartas called Arjuna again to battle. Arjuna was caught on the horns of a dilemma. He knew that his army was suffering because of Bhagadatta. He had to go there. Here were the Trigartas calling him to fight again. He did not know what to do. He had to choose. Finally he decided to fight the Trigartas first. Their attack was terrible this time. Krishna said: "Arjuna, send the astra called Vajra and destroy these sinners. They are becoming impossible". Arjuna invoked Indra and sent the Vajra,

the personal weapon of Indra. It rained havoc in the Trigarta army. It was a great achievement. Krishna was very pleased with Arjuna. The chariot was once again turned in the direction of the main fight. Susarma had not been killed. He still had a few of his brothers. Again he challenged Arjuna. The temper of Arjuna was frayed. He was exasperated by these devils. He spoke to Krishna: "Look at this Susarma. He has appeared again from the beyond to challenge me. My ears are becoming deaf hearing the cries of our harassed army which has been caught up in the coils of Bhagadatta and his elephant. I really do not know what to do. You have the reins in your hands. You lead the chariot where you will. I leave the decision to you". Krishna did not speak a word. Quietly he went towards the Trigartas. Arjuna fought as he had never fought before. In a few moments one of the brothers was killed. Arjuna now fought till the entire army began to run away. He made Susarma faint in his chariot by his arrows.

Krishna stood up in his chariot. He grasped the hands of Arjuna in his and said: "Arjuna, today you have fought wonderfully. You are the greatest archer I have seen. You have routed the Trigarta army single-handed. I am proud of you". Arjuna was very happy to hear the praises of Krishna. They hurried towards the main army. Looking at the white horses of Arjuna galloping towards them, the Pandavas heaved a sigh of relief. They all looked in the direction of Arjuna. The Kaurava army began to falter. The bow of Arjuna was proving its name as the most terrible bow that had ever been drawn against enemies. The joyful shouts of the Kaurava army began to change its tone now. The army was being slaughtered. Arjuna had been fighting since morning with the whole army of the Trigartas. It was not an easy fight. On top of that he saw the ruin that had been wrought in the army. He looked like Kaartikeya the son of Sankara, when he went to fight with the asuras. Arjuna advanced towards the spot where Bhagadatta was stationed. Arjuna's chariot was brought up in front of Bhagadatta.

Bhagadatta immediately attacked Arjuna with his elephant. A rain of arrows was shot by the old veteran from atop of the elephant. The arrows were stopped midway by the counter-arrows of Arjuna. This duel went on for some time. Bhagadatta became impatient. He made his elephant advance straight at the chariot of Arjuna. Krishna drove the chariot so very skilfully that he managed to avoid the coming elephant. It missed the mark by a very narrow margin. For a moment everyone thought that Arjuna and Krishna had been crushed by Supritika. Again the old king began to pour his arrows on Arjuna. Several of them were aimed at Krishna. Arjuna snapped the bow of Bhagadatta into two. Bhagadatta had a number of javelins to throw. Arjuna

allowed fourteen of them to be thrown and he broke every one of them. Arjuna concentrated on breaking the armour of the elephant. A powerful Sakti was now hurled by Bhagadatta at Krishna. Arjuna broke that and two more of them which were being sent one after another. Bhagadatta sent another at Arjuna. It hit against the jewelled crown of Arjuna. Setting it right with one hand, Arjuna kept on sending arrows with his other hand. He cut the bow of Bhagadatta. With another bow Bhagadatta began to harass Krishna. It looked as though he was more angry with Krishna than with Arjuna. This bow was also broken. The old king became very angry with Arjuna. He had been till now undaunted and this steady return from a man much younger than himself irritated him perhaps. In a mad fury Bhagadatta threw a goad at Arjuna, the goad which was used to lead the elephant. This goad, however, was not just any weapon. Bhagadatta had invoked the great Vishnu and it became the most terrible of all astras. It sped towards Arjuna like a hawk bent on killing a dove. All the people were looking at it with their blood frozen. It looked like the end of Arjuna.

In a moment Krishna stood up in the chariot and took the full impact of the astra on his beautiful chest which was decked with the jewel called Kaustubha. Bheema embraced Yudhishthira when he saw that Arjuna and Krishna were both well. There happened a miracle. The goad, the great Vaishnavastra, fell on the chest of Krishna and the people around saw it change into a garland of flowers. They were amazed at the sight. Arjuna was upset at the thought that Krishna took the dart on himself. He looked at him and said: "Krishna, why did you have to do it? I am here. Why did you come between me and the goad which was aimed at me? You should not have done it. It looks as though you are breaking your promise not to take an active part in the war". Krishna smiled and said: "You are right, Arjuna. I should not have done it. But, my dear friend, it belongs to me and I took it back. Once, in a wrong moment, I gave this Vaishnavastra to Prithivi, who was the mother of the great Naraka. She wanted him to be immune from every weapon. He had it with him. I killed him later. This astra was given by Naraka to Bhagadatta. If it is aimed at anyone, it will just have to kill the victim. I cannot afford to lose you, Arjuna. That is why I had to come between you and the astra. I am sorry. But now this Vaishnavastra has come back to me. It was because he possessed this that Bhagadatta was, till now, invincible. He has thrown it away. He has lost his immunity and his elephant too is now like any other elephant. It will not be hard to kill him now. Be quick, Arjuna".

Arjuna sent a sharp arrow towards the elephant called Supritika.

The arrow entered the head of the beast. It went right into the elephant. The magnificent animal collapsed on the field. The elephant of Bhagadatta would never more harass the army. It was dead. Arjuna aimed a sharp crescent-shaped arrow towards the chest of Bhagadatta. It pierced his chest. The great Bhagadatta fell down from the elephant. They were both terrible to look at: the grand king and his grand elephant. There was no one to equal either of them. The death of Bhagadatta was a great incident in the fight between the two armies on the second day of the leadership of Drona.

Arjuna descended from his chariot. He made a pradakshina round the fallen Bhagadatta. He had to pay his last respects to a great man. Bhagadatta was the friend of his father. He was one of the noblest ancients. His fame was great. Arjuna saluted the great man and returned to his chariot. This gesture of Arjuna was greatly appreciated by all the heroes on either side.

Chapter 6

DRONA'S PROMISE

Arjuna went back to the field. The sons of the king of Gandhara were ready to meet him. They were good fighters and the fight went on for some time. Finally Arjuna killed both of them. Duryodhana and his brothers were grieved to see the death of their uncles. Sakuni came up to avenge the death of his brothers. His army was routed by Arjuna. Sakuni was rather good at fighting with the use of maya tactics and he tried it on Arjuna. But it was futile in front of Arjuna's astras. Arjuna said: "Listen to me, you cheater. This Gandiva of mine does not know how to throw the dice. It can only throw sharp arrows which are like fire. Come and face them if you can". Sakuni had to give up and go away from the presence of Arjuna. The noise of the Gandiva struck terror into the hearts of everyone there. They all rushed to Drona for succour. Arjuna had been joined by the other members of the formidable team: Bheema, Satyaki, Dhrishtadyumna, Abhimanyu, Nakula, Sahadeva, Sikhandi and the sons of Draupadi.

Drona now advanced to check the progress of these men. Wherever he went, Drona was met by Dhrishtadyumna. Yudhishthira came to the front. The sight of Arjuna made him happy and bold enough to come to the presence of Drona. Duryodhana's brothers met Yudhishthira. Aswatthama came to the help of his father. He was spitting

fire. He was wild with the Pandava warriors. There was a prince called Neela, of Maahishmati. He was a brave young man and a very good fighter. He had been causing quite a lot of damage in the Kaurava army. Aswatthama went to him and challenged him: "Fight with me. I am here to defend the army". They fought and Neela was killed by the powerful Aswatthama. The Pandavas were infuriated by the death of the young prince. They attacked Aswatthama and the fight became general. Bheema rushed on the army. Drona fought with him. Radheya joined Drona. All the warriors on either side joined in the fight. It was a grand sight to see them all together.

Arjuna and Radheya met in a duel. Everyone was watching it with fascinated eyes. Radheya sent the Agneyastra and Arjuna quenched the fire from it by his Vaarunastra. The spectacle was magnificent. There were others who joined in the duel and made it general. Arjuna killed Satrunjaya, one of the good fighters on the side of the Kauravas. Dhrishtadyumna killed several more of them. Bheema, Nakula, Sahadeva, Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, Arjuna and Abhimanyu were fighting against Drona, Radheya, Aswatthama and Duryodhana. When the fight was still going on, the sun set on the gruesome scene. The fight was stopped and both the armies returned to their camps. The twelfth day of the great war ended. Arjuna had today achieved something that was considered impossible. He had been able to defeat the Samsaptakas and he had killed the great Bhagadatta and his elephant. The army of the Kauravas had suffered a great loss. The Kaurava camp was sunk in gloom.

All the Kauravas were thinking of only two things: the valour of Arjuna and the fact that Drona was not able to capture Yudhishthira. Duryodhana spoke to Drona with great sorrow and disappointment in his voice. The tone was that of a sulky child which had not been given what it wanted. He spoke words which looked as though they were just affectionate and chiding but were, actually, very harsh and cruel. Bheeshma had been used to this tone. Drona was not. He had been the commander for only two days. He did not know that it was not possible to please Duryodhana, try as he might. The fact that he tried would not be noticed by the king. Duryodhana remembered only one thing: Drona had promised to capture Yudhishthira and that he would bring him as a captive. He had failed to do what he promised to do. He said: "It is obvious, my lord, that your honoured self is sympathetic towards the opposite side. Nothing else can explain the fact that Yudhishthira could not be captured by you. You told us that, if Arjuna is away from the spot, not all the gods in the heavens could prevent you from capturing Yudhishthira. Evidently you have deliberately let the chance pass you by. Arjuna was lured away accord-

ing to your wishes, and Susarma has lost all his army and several of his brothers because of you. You are just fighting mildly with your favourite Pandavas. Or perhaps you are overrating your strength. You granted us a boon and now you are not keeping your promise to us".

Drona was touched to the quick by the cruel words of Duryodhana. Bheeshma was, at least, the grandfather of Duryodhana. The bonds of affection made him unmindful of the tone of his grandson's words. But Drona could not brook the sarcasm in the voice of Duryodhana. He was very upset. He said: "You know I tried my best. I had almost done it. Yudhishthira ran away. Before I could do anything about it, Arjuna came back. Nothing could be done after that. I assure you that, in tomorrow's battle, I will see that one man, one great warrior, one Maharathika, on their side, is killed. I am going to arrange my army in the formation called Chakravyuha or Padmavyuha. It cannot be broken by even the gods. Arjuna, of course, knows the art of breaking up that phalanx. He must be lured away from the battlefield. He must be away for the day. I will achieve something for which you will thank me. I am sure of that". Duryodhana was pacified. The Trigartas agreed to challenge Arjuna once again. There was great excitement in the Kaurava camp. Tomorrow something terrible was to happen. Drona had assured them of that. They were eagerly waiting for the sun to rise.

Chapter 7

THE CHAKRAVYUHA AND ABHIMANYU

The thirteenth day of the great war dawned. It was the third day of the leadership of Dronacharya. Early in the morning, the Trigartas came and challenged Arjuna. He had to proceed towards the southern side of the field. After he had left, the commander of the Kaurava army arranged his army in the formation called Chakravyuha or the Padmavyuha. The heart of the flower was the king. The many petals were the several heroes of the Kaurava army. Duryodhana was placed at the centre: the very heart of the flower. He was surrounded by the first layer of petals: Radheya, Dussasana, Kripa and some others. The next layer was made up of Jayadratha and his immense army. By his side was the son of the acharya, Aswatthama. Then came the many sons of Dhritarashtra. Then came Sakuni, Kritavarma, Salya, Bhoorisravas and his brother Sala. They were all wear-

ing red silks. They had red flower garlands. In the light of the morning sun the army looked just like a huge big lotus which had bloomed on the ground. Drona stood on the outskirts of the vyuha.

The attack began. Bheema led his army. With him were Satyaki, Dhrishtadyumna, Drupada, Kuntibhoja, Kshatradharma, Brihadkshatra, Dhrishtaketu the son of Sisupala, Nakula, Ghatotkacha, Sahadeva, Yudhamanyu, Uttamaujas, Sikhandi, the sons of Draupadi, Virata, Yudhishthira, the Kekaya brothers, and many others. They attacked the Padmavyuha in a body. Drona, however, was stationed at the outside of the vyuha. He looked like a range of mountains buffetted by the breakers of the surging ocean. They could do nothing. The Pandava heroes were warded off by Drona who was riding a chariot drawn by chestnut-coloured horses. There was nothing to be done. The Pandava army began to melt at an alarmingly fast rate and not one of them could enter the vyuha.

Yudhishthira did not know what was to be done. He was afraid that the entire army would be destroyed by the time evening drew. If only Arjuna had been there, it would have been so different. But he had gone away to the south end of the field. They did not know when he would return. Susarma was very angry with Arjuna and he was bent on fighting till the end of the last man in his army. There was only one thing to be done. Their only hope was Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna: the beautiful charming child of Subhadra. He had been taught the technique of breaking the Padmavyuha by Arjuna. Yudhishthira knew this. He decided to place on those young shoulders the great task of breaking into the Padmavyuha. Yudhishthira called his dear nephew to him and said: "My dear child. we have to do things in such a way as to escape the scolding of Arjuna. If he comes back and sees our army destroyed, he will blame me for not doing the right thing. This vyuha of Drona is now impregnable. Four people know how to break it up; Krishna, Pradyumna his son, Arjuna and you. I do not know a fifth. They are all not here. I request you, my child, to help us. You are my only hope. Please do the needful and break the vyuha".

Abhimanyu pondered for a moment. He smiled a sweet smile and said: "Of course I will do it, uncle. I am worried about only one thing. My father has taught me only one half of it. He has taught me how to enter the vyuha. But he has not yet taught me how to come out of it. If I get caught up inside this huge lotus, if danger assails me inside this, I will not be able to come out of it. I am worried only about that. I can easily break into it". Yudhishthira said: "I do not think we need worry about that. Once an opening is made in the vyuha by you, my child, we will do the rest. We will all follow you very

closely. The moment you make an opening into it, we will be there to follow you and break up the formation". Bheema said: "My child, I will follow you closely. With me will be Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, the Kekayas, Panchalas, the great Prabhadrakas and the Matsyas. Once the opening is made by you, it will only be a matter of a few moments before the vyuha is shattered by us".

Abhimanyu was very happy that he had been asked to undertake such a great task. His eyes flashed with joy. He was a very handsome young man. But today he looked like the full moon with all its beauty and all its glory. He looked as though a divine light was suffusing him. He was glowing. There was no one like him. Yudhishthira looked with pride and affection at the son of Arjuna, who was as glorious as his father. Abhimanyu said: "I am sure I will be able to do this today. You will see the Kauravas being burnt up by me like moths that fall against a flame. I will today bring lasting fame to the two families: the House of the Kurus and the House of the Vrishnis. I will make my father proud of me. I will make my uncle proud of me. I will make my mother feel that she is the mother of the noblest hero that fought on the great field of Kurukshetra. Today, my valour will be such that no one will forget it. After today, no one can utter my name without their eyes being lit up with admiration for me. Let the Kauravas see me in action today". Yudhishthira said: "May your words come true. May the gods above make this task of yours successful. I am sending all the great heroes on our side to protect you. They are like Rudra and the sun combined. God bless you, my child. Bring glory to the name of Arjuna and Krishna".

Abhimanyu saluted his uncles and set out on the dangerous mission entrusted to him. He was sure of his success. His father had taught him the method of breaking up this Padmavyuha. He knew the trick of entering it. The vyuha had a knack of closing up as soon as someone entered it. His father had warned him about it. That was the only thing that ought to worry him. But then, his uncles and the others were there to take care that the petals of the lotus did not close up and trap him as a real lotus traps the bee that comes to it for honey. There was absolutely no need to worry. He did not know how to come out of the vyuha. But then, the vyuha would be destroyed by the others in a short time.

The chariot of Abhimanyu was ready. He ascended it. His banner was the Kovidara. Abhimanyu stood in his chariot and turned his smiling eyes on all his uncles. They were proud of the young son of Arjuna. They all stood aside to let him pass. They all saw the chariot going fast towards the terrible Padmavyuha guarded by Drona. All of them now followed him in their chariots. It was a grand procession.

"Quick! Quick!" said Abhimanyu to his charioteer. "Take me quickly to the Kaurava army. I am impatient to break this vyuha of Drona. I must do it before the army of my uncle is destroyed. I must hurry". The charioteer was worried. His voice was grave when he heard the words of the young man. He said: "I do not like to take you there. I feel that the Pandavas have placed too big a burden on your young shoulders. You should set about a task only after making sure that you will be able to do it. This sinful brahmin, this Drona, is a pastmaster in the handling of astras. You are still a child and he is a veteran. I am feeling very nervous. I do not like your going". Abhimanyu laughed at his charioteer and his words. He said: "I am looking forward to this encounter with the great Drona. He is so sure of himself that it will be a pleasure to undermine his smug complacency. Why are you nervous? Why fear about my safety? I am the son of Arjuna. I am the nephew of Krishna. I can defy Indra, the lord of the heavens. It is nothing to me to fight this Drona. All the warriors on the opposite side put together cannot equal me. How can fear approach the son of Arjuna? I will burn the entire army of the Kauravas. I will not call myself the son of the great Arjuna and Subhadra if I do not succeed in routing the army of the Kauravas". The charioteer was silent. Very unwillingly, he coaxed the horses to carry them towards the formidable Padmavyuha, the triumph of Drona.

Chapter 8

JAYADRATHA IS FORMIDABLE

The chariot of Abhimanyu flashed towards the vyuha like a streak of lightning. If it had not been for the banner which was different, people would have thought that it was Arjuna who was hurrying towards the enemy army. The two armies clashed. The son of Arjuna, the handsome Abhimanyu, broke up the entrance to the vyuha. He did something which was beyond the ken of human beings. The great Padmavyuha which was considered to be unbreakable was opened by Abhimanyu under the very eyes of Drona. Breaking it, he entered the vyuha. There was panic in the Kaurava army. The great son of Arjuna, the sixteen-year-old Abhimanyu, had managed to break the phalanx. He had outwitted the old man Drona. Abhimanyu faced the combined onslaught of many chariots and warriors at the same time.

But he was Death itself. He was just raining arrows on them, literally raining arrows. The field took up the aspect it usually presented at the end of the day. The heap of dead men rose every moment. The Kauravas looked in all the ten directions for help. It was impossible to stop the progress of this child. Duryodhana was the first to attack Abhimanyu. He was wild with him for having broken the vyuha. Drona saw this and came to the help of the king. He knew that it would be dangerous for Duryodhana to face Abhimanyu. Drona, Aswatthama, Kripa, Kritavarma, Radheya and Sakuni hurried to the side of Duryodhana. Actually the king was at the very heart of the vyuha but Abhimanyu had managed to reach it in a matter of moments.

All the heroes attacked Abhimanyu. He revelled in the fight. He was undaunted. The others joined up now: Bhoorisravas, Dussasana and the other brothers of the king. They had absolutely no chance. Radheya was hurt terribly by the arrows of Abhimanyu. Most of them had to beat a hasty retreat. They were powerless to stop Abhimanyu's progress. Salya and Radheya with some of the Kaurava heroes were still fighting. Radheya was made to fall on the ground. He got up and fought again. Salya was faring badly in his fight. In short, there was no one who could stand up against Abhimanyu. Indeed, he was the son of Arjuna. Single-handed, he was keeping the entire army at bay. All the heroes who had been stationed to protect the vyuha were being treated as so many bits of wood by the young Abhimanyu. The smile did not leave the face of the child when he was harassed by the many warriors. The nephew of Krishna outshone his father and his uncle in his valour. It is no exaggeration to say that he was killing the enemies by thousands. He had all the astras at his command and he was using them all. He was a very graceful and skilful fighter. His archery was in a class by itself. They saw it. The arrows which came from his bow looked like the rays of the sun coming out in millions.

Drona was watching his progress. He told Kripa: "Abhimanyu ranks among the greatest archers. He has come here today to please his uncles Yudhishthira, Bheema, Nakula and Sahadeva. If he makes up his mind, he can destroy this entire army easily. I am surprised that he has not done so already". Duryodhana was not pleased with the words of Drona. Drona praised the enemy and he did not relish it. The enemy was the son of Arjuna, the favoured pupil of Drona. Duryodhana looked at Radheya and said: "Radheya, this our acharya, is a great man. Not Indra nor Yama can defy him in battle. Why then think of the fate of mere mortals? If he makes up his mind, he can kill this young fool. But, Radheya, you forget the most important secret. Abhimanyu is the son of his dear beloved pupil Arjuna. Since

our acharya is very fond of Arjuna, he is protecting Abhimanyu. He has not the heart to hurt him or to wound him. Sure of this partiality of Drona, this young man is coursing through our army with so much confidence. I can see it clearly. I can easily explain the courage of Abhimanyu". Dussasana was impressed by the words of Duryodhana. He came forward and said: "You are right. It is no use depending on our acharya to kill Abhimanyu. I will kill him now. I will cover him as Rahu does the sun. Hearing that Abhimanyu is dead, Krishna and Arjuna will lose their arrogance. They will die with the sorrow of his death. With their death, the Pandavas will all die. Because of the death of this one person, all the Pandavas can be killed. I will please you, my lord, by doing this service to you". He went to the presence of Abhimanyu and challenged him. The fight lasted a few moments, and Dussasana was found fleeing for dear life. He was replaced by Radheya. He suffered the same fate, though the fight lasted longer.

All the heroes on the side of the Pandavas were following the chariot of Abhimanyu, from the moment he left their camp. They were able to keep up with him until he entered the vyuha. They were Yudhishthira, Bheema, Sikhandi, Satyaki, Drupada, Dhrishtadyumna, Virata, Nakula, Sahadeva, the Kekayas and Dhrishtaketu. They were all almost accompanying Abhimanyu. Just at the entrance of the vyuha, Abhimanyu turned round from his chariot and looked at them with a beautiful smile lighting up his face. That was the last of him they saw. They tried to follow the disappearing chariot of the young child who smilingly took leave of them. They were stopped by Jayadratha.

Bheema laughed at Jayadratha. He remembered the time when Jayadratha had carried away Draupadi. He had been well punished by Arjuna and himself. This Jayadratha had now the audacity to challenge the progress of the Pandavas! Yudhishthira and Satyaki attacked Jayadratha. He withstood their attack. He was able to tackle all of them. He would not let them advance even by a hair-breadth. He sealed up the opening which had been made by Abhimanyu. Abhimanyu was going further into the vyuha. He was going farther and still farther away from them, and they could do nothing because of this dreadful Jayadratha who seemed to be winning by fluke! Yudhishthira cut his bow into two. But Jayadratha took up another bow and continued to fight. Bheema cut up that bow, and his banner too. That did not stop Jayadratha. He laughed and took up another bow. He killed the horses of Bheema's chariot and his bow was cut too.

Jayadratha had obtained a boon from Sankara that he would be able to defy the Pandavas single-handed, provided Arjuna and Krishna were not there. He was, therefore, able to keep the Pandavas from

entering the vyuha along with Abhimanyu. They fought furiously and desperately since everything that was dear to them was at stake. Jayadratha would not let them enter. He had sealed up the entrance to the vyuha and was keeping guard over it. The Pandavas were overcome with the horror of the situation. They remembered the thoughtful look on the face of Abhimanyu when he said: "If I get caught up inside this lotus, if danger assails me there, inside this, I will not be able to come out of it. I am worried about the afterwards". Yudhishthira was horror-stricken at his own thoughtlessness in sending the child. Depending on the strength of all of them, the son of Arjuna had entered the jaws of death. Now, they were helpless against the power of Jayadratha, of all men.

"Once the opening is made by you, it will be a matter of a few moments before the vyuha is shattered by us" Bheema had said. He looked at Yudhishthira with such anguish in his eyes that even the gods in the heavens wept.

CHAPTER 9

THE KILLING OF ABHIMANYU

Abhimanyu was continuing his work of destruction inside the vyuha. The army was losing hopes of living through the day. It was not possible to estimate the loss to the Kaurava army. Abhimanyu was mowing it down so fast and so steadily that Duryodhana was quite desperate. Rukmaratha, a son of Salya, challenged Abhimanyu. He was a good fighter. The duel was interesting to watch. But Abhimanyu killed him. Other sons of Salya came to the presence of Abhimanyu. They were all carried away from the field as they fainted in their chariots, unable to bear the arrows of Abhimanyu. Everyone, who came to fight with Abhimanyu, had to run or die. Seeing his valour, Drona, Aswatthama, Kripa, Brihadbala, the king of the Kosalas, Duryodhana, Radheya, Kritavarma and Sakuni came to fight with him. Lakshana Kumara, the son of Duryodhana, challenged Abhimanyu. Both were young and both were handsome. Both were very powerful fighters, and an excellent duel was fought. But in a few moments, under the watching eyes of Duryodhana, Lakshana Kumara was killed by Abhimanyu. Duryodhana was shocked and grieved by the sudden tragedy. He shouted: "This sinner has got to be killed". It was then that the horrible, cruel tragedy took shape. Six great men took part in it.

Drona, Kripa, Aswatthama, Radheya, Brihadbala and Kritavarma together attacked Abhimanyu. He fought with all of them, and he attacked Jayadratha also. The child must have realized that the Pandavas could not enter the vyuha along with him because of Jayadratha. He did not know the way out. He wanted to destroy the entire vyuha and thus avoid that problem. There would be no vyuha at all. He fought desperately with Jayadratha. If Jayadratha could be defeated, the way was clear for the Pandava warriors. But Jayadratha blocked the passage of Abhimanyu with an array of elephants and a huge army. Abhimanyu looked like the newly-risen sun surrounded by dense black rain clouds. He now fought furiously with all the six Maharathikas. They harassed him with their weapons, but they were all defeated. Abhimanyu was able to make them go back. They were not able to fight with him. He had killed their horses. Their bows were gone, and their chariots too. They tried again and again to meet his onslaught. Abhimanyu hurt Radheya with his terrible arrows. He was attacked by Aswatthama, Kripa and Drona. Salya and Brihadbala joined these men. Abhimanyu sent a sharp arrow towards Brihadbala. He fell down dead, his heart torn by the arrow of Abhimanyu. Radheya's body was covered by blood. The son of Dussasana came to challenge Abhimanyu. Abhimanyu said: "I am glad to see that you are a better fighter than your father. He ran away from the fight. You seem to be braver than that coward". Aswatthama came to the help of the son of Dussasana.

Sakuni went to the king and said: "It is not possible to kill this young man. It is not possible to stop his progress. He has got to be killed. Let us all kill him together". Radheya went to Drona and said: "The son of Arjuna is bent on killing all of us. Please make haste and tell us how he can be killed. Either he has to be killed or we will all have to die. I am standing here because it is my duty to be with my king. Or else I would go away from here. These arrows of Abhimanyu are burning my entire body". Drona said: "There is no one to equal the son of my Arjuna. Hurt as I am by his arrows, I cannot help admiring his skill and valour. If he is to be killed, his armour has to be broken. Arjuna has taught him to wear this impenetrable armour. That is why he is able to withstand our arrows. So long as he has his chariot, so long as he has his bow in his hand, he is invincible. If you want to kill him, you must kill his two charioteers, you must destroy his chariot, you must deprive him of his bow. If you can do all this, then, perhaps, you may be able to kill him. Let me see if you can do it. Cut the string of his bow when he is not looking. You cannot do it if you are facing him". Drona stopped talking and Radheya walked away.

The meanest act in his entire life was then performed bv the man Radheya. When the child Abhimanyu was fighting, Radheya went to him. He stood behind Abhimanyu and cut his bow with his arrows. The startled young warrior turned round to see who could have done such a dastardly thing. Drona at once killed the horses of Abhimanyu's chariot. Kripa killed the two charioteers of Abhimanyu. The others attacked him with their arrows. These were Kritavarma, Aswatthama and Dussasana's son. Six of the Maharathikas attacked this single warrior. Abhimanyu did not have a chariot. He did not have a bow. The defenceless child was attacked by the six heroes on the side of the Kauravas. Abhimanyu's eyes were red with fury and contempt. He looked at Drona and said: "You are a great man. You are the commander of the Kaurava army. You have done this injustice to me. How dare you do this?" Abhimanyu turned towards Radheya and said: "You call yourself a disciple of Bhargava. You dare to think that you are equal to my father in archery. I thought that you, at least, were capable of noble thoughts. My uncle has said that you are a noble man: that you are a chivalrous fighter. So this is all your nobility! You are all men whose names are spoken with affection and awe because of your valour. Is this all the valour you are capable of? How is it the earth does not open up and swallow you? How can she bear the shame of bearing people like you?"

Abhimanyu had no time to think. He had to fight. He took his sword and shield and jumped out of his chariot. He jumped at them with the intention of killing them. Drona saw him and his fury. With his sharp arrows he cut the hilt of the sword of Abhimanyu. Radheya shot his arrows at the shield of the young child and broke it to pieces. Young Abhimanyu was now without a bow: without a chariot: without a sword: without a shield. He was absolutely defenceless and completely at the mercy of six cruel men who were bent on killing him.

For a moment Abhimanyu thought of his father. He was sorry only about one thing. He would not be able to see the pride in the eyes of his father when he heard about his wonderful feat. He thought of his mother, the beautiful Subhadra. His thoughts were sad. He knew that her heart would be broken. He thought of Krishna. It was just his bad luck that he could not see his father and his uncle before he died. Yudhishthira and Bheema came to his mind's eye. Poor uncles, they tried their best to come to him. But they could not. Jayadratha was in their way. Yes, Jayadratha. His father would kill that man Jayadratha when he came to know about this. Yudhishthira would be horrified at the crime committed on the Kurukshetra field. But then, when the time came, his death would be avenged. These six heroes would regret their cowardly attack on him.

Abhimanyu was helpless. He rushed to his chariot and took the wheel of the chariot in his two hands. He whirled it about his head. With his form full of the arrows of his enemies, with his frame drenched in blood, with his face glowing with anger and sheer contempt and pride, the young warrior stood there in their midst with the chariot-wheel in his hand, looking like the Lord Vishnu. He said: "Even now it is not too late. I am giving you all a chance to redeem your honour. Come and fight with me. Come one by one. I will fight with you. Come, one by one. I can fight with each one of you. Come". Even as he was saying this, Abhimanyu rushed at Drona. He looked like Vishnu Himself, with the wheel in his hand. His hair was flying in the breeze. His face had taken on an unearthly glow. He was the most wonderful sight as he stood there, with a smile on his lips, with the wheel upraised. Even before he could fling it on Drona, the six of them broke that wheel into a hundred fragments. Abhimanyu now took up the mace. He said once again: "Come one by one: yes, one by one. I can fight all of you if you come one by one". His words fell on deaf ears. Abhimanyu rushed at Aswatthama. Terrified at the sight of Abhimanyu advancing like the God of Death, Aswatthama ran away from his neighbourhood. Abhimanyu killed the horses of Aswatthama. He rushed towards the chariot of the son of Dussasana. He broke his chariot. Dussasana's son leaped at Abhimanyu with his mace raised aloft. The two were engaged in a fight for life.

Abhimanyu had become completely fatigued by the terrible fighting of the day. He did not mind it. He fought desperately. Each was bent on killing the other. When he saw Abhimanyu fall down, the son of Dussasana rushed at him. Abhimanyu was recovering from his faint. He was just about to rise. Then the son of Dussasana raised his mace and hit Abhimanyu on the head. Abhimanyu fell down again, not being able to stand the force of the stroke. He fell down, never to rise again. Abhimanyu was killed.

Abhimanyu was killed most treacherously by the brave warriors on the side of the Kauravas. Six great warriors dared to commit this most dastardly crime on the holy field called Kurukshetra. Drona, the commander of the Kaurava host proved himself to be as sinful and treacherous as the king for whom he fought. The son of Drona, Aswatthama, the son born by the grace of Sankara, was party to the murder of a child of sixteen.

It was a crime, the like of which had never been committed before. Arjuna's beautiful son was lying dead, and these men danced around the dead form of that hero like animals, like beasts without any feelings. No. A beast would have been more sympathetic. They were monsters. Abhimanyu was killed by six great heroes on the side of the Kauravas.

He had churned the army of the Kauravas like a whale which churns the sea. They looked on him as he lay on the battle-field, with his beautiful face like the moon on the eastern hill, with his lotus eyes closed, with his form full of the arrows that had been shot at him. There was great joy in their hearts. They shouted for joy. The cry was taken up by the others and the army resounded with their war-cry: their cry of victory. The cry struck terror into the heart of Yudhishthira and Bheema. They knew at once that Abhimanyu was killed. The thought of the young child as he stood in his chariot, smiling at them, made Yudhishthira fall down in a faint. They were not prepared for this calamity. In the absence of Arjuna and Krishna, this grave injustice had been done, and the Pandava host did not know what they were to tell Arjuna when he came back from the fight with the Trigartas. The sun had set. The Kauravas had returned to their camp with great joy at the death of Abhimanyu, and the Pandava camp was sunk in the lowest depths of despair.

Chapter 10

ARJUNA'S OATH

Yudhishthira sat on the ground with his eyes raining tears. He said: "That child went to fight with the words: 'Do not fear. I will certainly break the vyuha. If I get caught up inside it, I will not be able to come out of it. That is what is worrying me'. I assured him that we would all take care of him. What is the use of my living when I could not do what I promised to do? I sent him to his death. Please kill me, all of you, before Arjuna comes and asks me, 'Why did you kill my son?' My child defeated all of them: Kripa, Salya, Duryodhana, Drona, Aswatthama, and so many others. They were all not able to meet the dreadful fighting of my child Abhimanyu. This hero was killed in the most treacherous manner imaginable. What can I say to Arjuna when he comes back? What am I to say to Krishna? What to Subhadra? I love Arjuna and Subhadra. No one is more dear to me than Krishna. And I have done this to them! I sent that child to his death. In my desire to win the war, I killed my child. Nothing will make me forget this. I killed him! I killed Abhimanyu!" Yudhishthira fainted away.

Arjuna had finally defeated the Samsaptakas. The sun had set, and the chariot of Arjuna was turned towards the camp of the Pandavas.

The omens did not speak well. Arjuna was perturbed by it. He was talking to Krishna about the several things which had happened that day on the battle-field. But his mind was upset by the evil omens. His throat became parched. He said: "Krishna, my mind misgives me. I am feeling as though I have a fever in my limbs. I have never before felt fatigued by the battle. But today I feel listless. These evil omens make me afraid. I do not know what has happened. I hope nothing has happened to my brother". Krishna said: "I am sure nothing has happened to your brothers. Nothing can happen to them. Your fears are unwarranted. Cast off this worry and be happy at the thought that the Trigartas are all subdued. They will not challenge you any more. No one can lure you away from the battle-field from now on".

They reached the camp. Silence greeted Arjuna. It was a silence, the like of which he had never known before. He said: "Krishna, what is this? There seems to be nothing here. Everyday, music could be heard from the veenas that were played. We would always hear the trumpets and other war instruments announcing our victory. But today nothing seems to be alive. Look at all these soldiers, Krishna. No one seems to welcome me. They are all avoiding me. What have I done to deserve this? They dare not meet my eyes. No one is here to greet me with words of praise for my fighting. I am afraid. No one is here, none of my own people. My brothers are not waiting for my coming. I hope nothing has happened to Virata or Drupada. I do not see my Abhimanyu or the sons of Draupadi. My Abhimanyu usually welcomes me with his charming smile".

They went to the tent of Yudhishthira. There they saw all of them sitting dejectedly. Arjuna could not understand it. He looked at Yudhishthira. Yudhishthira hung his head down and wiped his eyes with his hands. Bheema was just limp with grief. Arjuna had never seen him thus. Bheema got up to greet Arjuna and fell down on the floor, his face convulsed with grief. Nakula was staring at the ground. Sahadeva was looking out of the tent. He would not look at Arjuna. No one would look at Arjuna. This was terrible. Arjuna scanned the people there, who were sitting in the gloom. There were no lamps lit. Arjuna looked and looked and could not see Abhimanyu anywhere. He spoke to them all: "Your faces are all pale and pained. I dare not guess what has happened. I do not see my darling child Abhimanyu. He would have welcomed me as soon as I came. He is not here. Where is he?" No one answered him. Only the sobs of Yudhishthira broke the silence.

Arjuna tried not to guess the truth. He said: "I was told that Drona had arranged his army in the terrible Padma vyuha. Do not tell me that you sent my child into that death-trap!" No one spoke.

Arjuna continued to talk. "No one among you can enter that vyuha except my child. I had taught him how to enter that vyuha. But I had not taught him how to come out of it. Did you send him into that Padmavyuha?" He paused for an answer. No one spoke. Again the sobs of Yudhishthira broke through. ARJUNA KNEW. He turned horrified eyes on all of them. They were afraid to look at him.

Yudhishthira came to him and said: "Do not speak a word more, Arjuna. Kill me first. You can talk afterwards. First kill me who killed your child. It is only thus you can avenge the death of Abhimanyu. I killed Abhimanyu. Yes, I killed Abhimanyu". Again he fainted away. Arjuna was too stunned to speak. He could not imagine his Abhimanyu as dead. Krishna could not stand up. He sat down on the floor near Bheema. His eyes were filled with tears. But looking at the anguish in the eyes of Bheema, he took his hand in his and squeezed it in silent sympathy. Bheema broke down. Arjuna had fainted. He got up and said: "Tell me, someone, how it happened. How did he die? How could he die? He was not taught how to get out of the Padmavyuha. He must have told you that. If he had been caught in it, he is sure to have been killed. Which man, prodded by fate, did dare to kill my son? How could he have had the courage to touch my son? How can I live after this? He was so brave and chivalrous. He would never attack first in a fight. He was the flower of chivalry. How could anyone have had the heart to kill him? I am not able to believe it". Arjuna lamented the death of Abhimanyu for a long time. He then turned to Yudhishthira and said: "How could you do it? How did you allow him inside the Padmavyuha without helping him? You were there, and Dhrishtadyumna and Nakula and Satyaki and Sahadeva. How could this have happened? I cannot understand how anyone could kill Abhimanyu. He is so hard to defy. Tell me who that man is". He did not get an answer to his question. He said: "I am sure there must have been some foul play. Or else Abhimanyu cannot be killed. I am certain of that". He threw down his bow and arrows. He fell down in a faint. He was revived.

Krishna took his hand in his, and said: "Arjuna, do not grieve so. Abhimanyu died the death of a hero. He died so that others may live. He has reached the heavens. It is a fitting death for a great hero like Abhimanyu. Look at your brothers, Arjuna. They are sunk in the depths of sorrow. It is up to you to comfort them. They are just broken with grief and self-reproach. Talk gently to your dear ones. Seeing you grieve, their grief is increasing. You cannot imagine how they must have suffered today. Abhimanyu is the beloved child of all of us. Remember that, my friend".

Arjuna went at once to Bheema. He fell at the feet of Yudhish-

thira and Bheema, and their tears now mingled. Arjuna spoke to Yudhishthira: "In my grief, I was blind to your feelings. Forgive me, my dear brother. Bheema, I am sorry I forgot myself. I can see what this must have meant to you all. I can compose myself. I am feeling that I am now strong enough to bear to hear the details of his death. Nakula, Sahadeva, Satyaki, tell me, all of you, how it happened. Dhrishtadyumna, my friend, tell me the name of that fool who has dared to do this to us. Yudhishthira, my lord, my mind is now strong enough". Arjuna broke down again. He said: "My heart must be made of stone. Or else it would have been broken all to pieces when I heard that Abhimanyu is dead. He is dead and I am living".

Yudhishthira made Arjuna sit down, and said: "Arjuna, I will tell you everything that led to the death of the jewel of the Pandavas, the dearest possession of yours. I will tell you. The Trigartas came and took you away. After that, Drona arranged his army in the Padmavyuha. We had a counter-arrangement, and the fight began. It was not possible to resist their onslaught. The vyuha was terrible. We could do nothing, absolutely nothing. It was like a fort which resisted all our skill. Our army was being defeated and all the while Drona was standing outside the vyuha, with a complacent look on his face. I knew that our army would be completely destroyed before the evening. I could not bear to see our innocent army being killed ruthlessly like that. Arjuna, I went to Abhimanyu and asked him if he would break the vyuha for us. He was pleased. He said: 'Do not fear, my uncle. I will certainly break the vyuha. My father has taught me that. If I can do this service to the great Pandavas, I will be proud of it. But I know only half the truth about the vyuha. I know how to enter it. But my father has not taught me how to get out of it. He has told me that the vyuha has a knack of closing up after someone has entered it. If I get caught up inside it, if danger assails me there, I will not be able to get out of it. That is what is worrying me'."

Here, the voice of Yudhishthira broke. He could not continue. Bheema spoke. He said: "Yes, Arjuna, that child said he could not come out of the vyuha. But we all assured him that *we* would take care of that. I assured him that we would all be with him and that, once the opening was made, then we would break it open. We were all there: Yudhishthira, myself, Nakula, Sahadeva, Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, Drupada, Virata, the Kekaya brothers, the sons of Draupadi and so many others. That child took on his young shoulders this great task which we all placed on him. The last we saw of him was when he stood on the chariot and turned back and looked on us with a beautiful smile of infinite charm lighting his face. That was the last

we saw of him". Bheema could not speak any more. He sobbed into the chest of Arjuna.

Again Yudhishthira took up the narration. He said: "We followed him in our chariots. We saw him enter the vyuha. We were just behind him. We could have entered the vyuha very easily. We saw the opening. Just as we were about to enter, Jayadratha came and stood before us. I thought that it would be easy to get past him. We saw Abhimanyu course through the enemy ranks like a meteor. We were sure of joining him. But then the petals of that huge lotus closed up once again. Jayadratha blocked up the passage, and we could not enter. We saw the child caught up inside the vyuha, and all of us, all of us, tried in vain to defeat Jayadratha. Single-handed, he managed to keep us all at bay. We heard the progress of Abhimanyu by the shouts of despair rising from the army of the Kauravas. He caused havoc. But in the end he died. Abhimanyu died". Yudhishthira stopped. He could not tell Arjuna about the murder of his son.

Sahadeva now came near Arjuna. He said: "My dear brother, prepare yourself to hear the story of the greatest crime that was committed on the field of Kurukshetra. Your son was surrounded by SIX MAHARATHIKAS: Drona, Kripa, Radheya, Aswatthama, Kritavarma and the son of Dussasana. These six surrounded him. Radheya cut his bow from behind: Drona killed his horses: Kripa killed his charioteers. The son of Dussasana killed Abhimanyu. Yes, Arjuna, they all murdered that child even under our very eyes. We saw it, and we could do nothing about it. You can punish us as you like. We all killed Abhimanyu". Sahadeva was overcome with grief.

They all sat silent, looking at Arjuna and his mounting fury. Arjuna fell down in a dead faint. They came near him and revived him with perfumed water. Arjuna got up. His frame was trembling with fury. He trembled as if with an ague. He stood up and said: "I promise you, I will kill that Jayadratha tomorrow. Even if he comes to me or to Krishna or to Yudhishthira for succour, I will kill him. Even if he is guarded by all the sons of Dhritarashtra, even if he is in the keeping of Sankara himself, I will kill him. I am to be his killer tomorrow. If I do not kill him, let me lose all the merit I have acquired so far. Let me go to the hell meant for the worst of sinners. Listen to my oath. I swear, in the name of fire and in the name of my beloved Gandiva, that I will kill that Jayadratha tomorrow. I will do it before the sun sets tomorrow. No one can prevent me from doing this. Jayadratha will be dead tomorrow. If I do not kill him, I promise that I will enter the blazing fire with the Gandiva in my hand".

Arjuna twanged his bow. The noise filled the four quarters. Krishna at once took up his Panchajanya and blew it lustily. The

terrible noise filled the air. The earth did tremble when the notes of the conch of Krishna mingled with the vibration of the string of the Gandiva. The Pandava camp was now happy. The thought that Jayadratha was to be killed by Arjuna made them feel elated. The Pandavas threw off their cloak of grief. Bheema was exhilarated. His voice became harsh with the emotion in his heart. He looked at Arjuna and said: "Even at this very moment the enemies would have heard the noise of your bow and the music of the Panchajanya. They would have died already. I am proud of you. I know that you will do what you have sworn to do".

The gloom lifted from the hearts of the brothers of Arjuna. They felt that the death of Abhimanyu would be avenged. They knew that all six of the murderers would be punished by Arjuna for their inhuman crime. Nemesis was already on their track. It would be just a matter of days before they would all be killed. All of them tried to forget the death of Abhimanyu in the desire for revenge. But they could not forget the thoughts of Abhimanyu. They could not wipe from their memory the picture of Abhimanyu when they last saw him: standing in his chariot and smiling at all of them just before he entered the terrible Padmavyuha.

Everyone in the Pandava camp, from Yudhishthira to the lowliest soldier, was mourning the death of Abhimanyu. No one slept in the camp that night. Along with the grief at the death of Abhimanyu, a new worry had entered their minds. It was the oath of Arjuna. Everyone thought: "In his grief at the death of his son, Arjuna has sworn to do a thing which seems impossible. May God grant him success in tomorrow's fight! May he come back to the camp with victory! We will stake all the punya we have acquired so far. God, please make his oath come true! May Arjuna come back victorious from the battle-field!" So prayed everyone in the camp of the Pandavas.

CHAPTER 11

JAYADRATHA'S PANIC

There was happiness in the camp of the Kauravas today. The acharya had done what he had promised to do. He had killed one of the great heroes on the side of the Pandavas. They were all gloating over their success. They were thinking of the grief of Arjuna when he came back from his fight with the Samsaptakas. Duryodhana heard that

their army had been defeated. The brave Susarma who had challenged Arjuna to please Duryodhana, had been vanquished by Arjuna. He had lost all his brothers and his army. But Duryodhana was not very upset by this. He was extremely pleased at the fact that Abhimanyu had been killed. They were all celebrating their victory.

The Kaurava camp was startled out of its pleasant thoughts by the sound of Arjuna's Gandiva and Krishna's Panchajanya. They did not know what it meant. They had been sure that Arjuna would be plunged in woe. It looked as though they were mistaken. The twang of the Gandiva meant only one thing: that Arjuna was very pleased about something. The Panchajanya, which was blown so lustily by Krishna, meant that he was happy too. This was not what they expected of the Pandavas. They were waiting for a different kind of noise. They were hoping that the Pandavas would take thought and die. Duryodhana was waiting impatiently for their spies from the Pandava camp to bring them news about the latest development in their plan.

The spies came. They told him about the oath of Arjuna. Jayadratha was terrified. He rushed to Duryodhana. He said: "I am sure Arjuna will do what he has sworn to do. There is nothing else for me to do except run away. I will go back to my kingdom. I will go back to my father. No one can kill a man who has run away from the battle-field. It is against the Dharma of a good kshatriya. Arjuna is righteous. He will not pursue me. I will save my life by running away". Duryodhana was not so upset as he ought to have been, about the fears of Jayadratha. Jayadratha had served his purpose. Duryodhana, who always thought of himself first, and then of others, laughed at the fears of Jayadratha. He said: "Do not be so frightened. Arjuna cannot kill you. You say that you will run away from the battle-field: that a righteous warrior will not kill a man who has run away. But remember, our killing of Abhimanyu was anything but righteous. Arjuna knows it. In fact, the spies have just told us what he said: 'Even if he is in the keeping of Sankara himself, I will kill him'. There is no use in your running away. As for your fears, they are just foolish. You will be guarded by all of us. In the midst of so many of the Kaurava heroes, you will be safe. Indra himself cannot do anything to you. I will guard you. Radheya, Vivimsati, Sala, Salya, Chitrasena, Bhoorisravas, Vrishasena, Purumitra, Kripa, Bhoja, Vikarna, Durmukha, Dussasana, Vinda and Anuvinda, our Aswatthama, Sakuni and Alambusa are some of the heroes who will guard you. You are yourself a great fighter. Why should you fear the power of Arjuna? He is not a god. Cast off all your fears. We will all take care of you. I will see that not a hair of your head is touched. There is also this to be said. Arjuna has sworn that he

will fall into the fire if he does not keep up his oath. Because of you, we will be rid of Arjuna. Without Arjuna, the Pandavas can do nothing. This is a heaven-sent opportunity. Let us not lose it".

Duryodhana's words were comforting to Jayadratha. But they were not reassuring enough. He went with the king to the presence of Drona. Jayadratha asked him: "I want you to tell me if I am the better fighter or Arjuna. I want your frank opinion". Drona said: "You have both had the same teacher, I know. But he has improved his skill by constant practice and also he has in his possession all the divine astras. But that is all beside the point. I am here to protect you from Arjuna tomorrow. I will build a vyuha which will baffle even Arjuna, and I will keep you inside that. I will stand guard at the entrance of the vyuha as I did today, and no one can pass me and enter, not even Arjuna. I am sure of it. Why are you so afraid? I will try my best to protect you. If I fail, you must face death. After all, one has to die sooner or later. You will die on the battle-field, fighting. You will reach the heavens. There is no use in fretting about something which may not happen. Go and rest in peace. I am going to build a triple vyuha tomorrow. The first portion will be a Sakatavyuha. Beyond this Sakatavyuha I will have a Padmavyuha. Inside this, will be a Suchimukhavyuha. At the other end of this third vyuha you will be placed with all the heroes to guard you. I will be guarding the vyuhas. It will not be possible to get past me. Even if Arjuna manages to get past the first two vyuhas, he will find it very difficult to reach you. By the time he reaches the third vyuha, it will be evening. His oath will become false. Do not worry so much about tomorrow".

Drona's words made Jayadratha feel that there was not much danger for him. He was reassured. They all went back to their tents. There was absolutely no chance of Arjuna succeeding in his attempt tomorrow. That was the feeling in the minds of all of them.

Krishna went to Arjuna's tent. He said: "Arjuna, it is a very rash thing you have done today. You have taken an oath in the presence of your brothers and all the heroes that you will kill Jayadratha tomorrow before the sun sets. Why did you take the oath without consulting me? I would have given you proper advice. You have taken upon yourself a very great task. I only hope that you will not have to face the ridicule of the world. What made you think that the task will be easy? I have just now heard from our spies that every precaution is being taken by your dear acharya to guard Jayadratha. As soon as they heard the twang of your bow, the Kauravas were worried about the reason for your happiness. Then their spies went and told them about your oath. They have asked Drona to protect Jaya-

dratha. He has promised to do so. Drona is going to have a triple vyuha. The first portion of the army will be half a Sakatavyuha and half Padma. Beyond that will be a Suchimukhavyuha. All the great heroes like Radheya, Bhoorisravas, Aswatthama, Vrishasena, Durjaya, Kripa, Salya, Durmukha and Drona, will be there to guard the vyuhas. The final vyuha will baffle you. At the very end of it will be Jayadratha and all along the needle will be placed the best fighters on their side. Arjuna, you will have a terrible task ahead of you. I am worried about the fighting you will have to do tomorrow. I wish you had not taken it. If you fail, I dread to think of the consequences. I do not want to lose you, Arjuna".

Arjuna smiled and said: "I know that all the heroes you have mentioned are all far inferior to me. I can also defeat Drona and his son. I am sure to kill Jayadratha tomorrow. Duryodhana thinks that his commander is great. He is depending on him to win this war. I will tackle the great Drona first. Krishna, watch me kill all the great warriors on the side of Duryodhana. I will show them what I can do. Watch my Gandiva tomorrow. It will glow as it has not done so far. Jayadratha has got to be killed by sunset tomorrow. My Abhimanyu will be watching me. I cannot fail. I will not fail. We must leave early in the morning tomorrow. Please keep all the weapons ready in my chariot tomorrow. Krishna, I have a bow called the Gandiva. It is the best in the world. I am Arjuna. I have been called the best archer in the world. I have a charioteer by name Krishna. He is the best man in this world. Why then, should I worry? Do not insult yourself and your friend and this, my other friend, the Gandiva, by thinking that tomorrow I may not be able to keep my promise. You are with me. That means victory is mine".

They both sat silent for a few moments. They were both thinking of Abhimanyu. Suddenly Arjuna said: "Krishna, I cannot face Subhadra and her tears. I cannot face her now. Please go to her for my sake, and comfort her". Krishna said: "I know. It will be hard for you. I will certainly go and see her now".

Krishna went to see his beloved sister. It was awful to see the grief of the mother at the death of her son. He went and sat by her side. They sat thus for a long time. Krishna said: "Subhadra, you must not grieve for your son so much. He has reached the heavens. He is part of the moon. He is happy. We must not grieve for one who is happy. He is alive as long as his name is alive. Can anyone forget Abhimanyu in this world? Weep not, my dear sister. He lived as no one has lived. As for his death, why, many will vie with each other for a death like that of Abhimanyu. We are all mortal. We all have to die. But it is not possible to die a grand death as Abhimanyu

did. People perform a number of good acts and a great number of sacrifices and yajnas to reach the realms of Indra. But young Abhimanyu has reached that realm because he is a kshatriya and because he died on the battle-field. You are the daughter of the House of the Vrishnis. You are the sister of heroes: the wife of the greatest hero in this world: the mother of the most wonderful hero that fought in the battle. It is not right that you should weep like this for our Abhimanyu. Come, rise up and wipe your dear eyes".

Subhadra heard these words of Krishna. She said: "Krishna, you ask me not to weep. But how can I do anything else? When I think of his beautiful face and lotus eyes, when I think of his dear voice calling me 'mother!' when I think that his body will now be on the battle-field covered by dust and blood, what can I do but weep? When the five Pandavas are alive, when the great Arjuna and Krishna were alive, how could this happen to my son? He was great. He was brave. He was gentle and sweet-natured. How could this have happened to him? Krishna, how could you have allowed this to happen to my child? How is it, the great Pandavas were not able to protect this child? I thought they were all heroes. I see that I was mistaken".

Krishna said: "In your grief you are saying this. My dear sister, Abhimanyu was killed by unfair means. He could never have been killed in fair fight. When I was away with Arjuna, these murderers trapped the child in their deadly vyuha and managed to kill him. How can you say that the Pandavas did not protect him? On the holy field called Kurukshetra, Adharma has been born today. Do you think those men will go unpunished for this vile crime of theirs? You will see it tomorrow. Arjuna has sworn that he will kill that sinful Jayadratha tomorrow before the sun sets. This is the last night he spends on this earth. He will be killed mercilessly tomorrow. Cast away this sorrow. Think of your son as one of the gods today. He died as a kshatriya should. Think of the many mothers who have lost their sons during these thirteen days of war. Have they not been brave? You are to stop this weeping and comfort poor Uttara who is heart-broken. She is bearing Abhimanyu's son. You must guard her. You must now be her mother and wipe her tears. Abhimanyu died the death of a hero. He was killed ruthlessly by six great heroes on the side of the Kauravas. His death will be avenged by Arjuna. You can be sure of that. Come now, console your child Uttara". Krishna made her go to Uttara and, after comforting them both and Draupadi, he came back to Arjuna.

Arjuna was waiting for him. He had all the things ready to worship Krishna. This was, to him, a daily ritual. He offered flowers and fruits and honey to Krishna after worshipping him. Krishna said: "Go to sleep, Arjuna. I will strive for your success in the war that

is to be fought tomorrow". Krishna took leave of Arjuna and, ascending his chariot which was driven by Daruka, he went to his apartments.

CHAPTER 12

KRISHNA'S PREPARATIONS

Krishna lay down on his snowy bed and was immersed in thought. Sleep would not come to his eyes. It was long past midnight. Still Krishna could not sleep. He sat up in his bed. He sent for Daruka. Krishna said: "Daruka, you have also heard the oath of Arjuna: that he is going to kill Jayadratha tomorrow before sunset. Duryodhana has also heard about it and he has made arrangements to guard Jayadratha. Arjuna is a great hero. He has fought with the enemies of Indra and destroyed them single-handed. I know that. But I am feeling that this task he has undertaken will be too much for him. The array tomorrow will be formidable. Drona is at the head of the team of warriors who are to guard Jayadratha. The time of the year is such that the sun sets early. It is now Dakshinayana. Arjuna will not have time to reach the Suchimukhavyuha before sunset. I am afraid of that. Daruka, you know the affection I have for Arjuna. I do not love my sons or my wives or my relations or my other friends as I love Arjuna. If Arjuna fails to do what he has sworn to do, he will fall into the blazing fire and kill himself. I cannot live even for a moment in a world where Arjuna is not living. I feel that I will have to fight in tomorrow's battle. I have sworn not to. But I am prepared to break my oath in order to make the oath of Arjuna true. I will kill Radheya and Duryodhana if need be, and save Arjuna's reputation. Let the world see my prowess tomorrow. I will fight for the sake of my heart's dearest friend. I will use my chakra called Sudarshana, and my mace Kaumodaki. The world will then see my love for the Pandavas. Their enemies are my enemies and their friends are my friends. Half my body and soul is Arjuna. Arjuna is part of Krishna and Krishna is part of Arjuna. No one can come between us.

"Now, Daruka, tonight, you must do something for me. Prepare my own chariot for the war. Place all my weapons in it. Place my bow Sarnga, my chakra Sudarshana, and my mace Kaumodaki in it. Also my Sakti. Fix on the chariot my banner, the Garuda. Yoke my dear horses Valaahaka, Saibya, Meghapushpa and Sugriva. Place the armours on the horses. You must also wear your armour. Wait

for me. If, at any time of the day, you hear me blowing my Panchajanya in the *Rishabha* note, come to me at once. I will then prove to the world how much I love Arjuna. I must guard him as I would my brother. We have shared all our joys and all our sorrows. I will try my level best to make Arjuna keep his oath. If it looks as though he cannot, I will interfere and do the needful. Jayadratha must die tomorrow before the sun sets".

Daruka listened in silence. He looked up when Krishna finished talking. He said: "My lord, Arjuna cannot lose. He is sure to be successful. You are his charioteer. How can he lose? However, I will do as you have commanded me to do. I will keep the chariot in readiness". Daruka left the presence of Krishna. Krishna sighed a sigh of relief. He looked as though a burden had been lifted off his mind. He lay down on the bed.

Arjuna lay on his bed. For a long time thoughts of tomorrow and the task ahead of him robbed him of his sleep. He thought again and again of the words of Krishna that he should not have taken the oath so rashly. His mind began to wander. He was hoping that he could kill Jayadratha. With these thoughts in his mind Arjuna drifted into a troubled sleep. His sleep was haunted by a dream. Krishna melted into his dream. He said: "Arjuna, do not worry. Why are you worried? Tell me that. Worry is a sure destroyer of success. This your worry will benefit the enemies and weaken you. Do not let the disease destroy you". Arjuna said: "Krishna, I have taken a terrible oath that I will slay Jayadratha tomorrow. I must do it before sunset. The Kauravas have made all arrangements for his protection. If I am not able to do what I have sworn to do, the world will laugh at me. I will die if I am not able to kill Jayadratha. I do not want to be false to my oath. That is what I am worried about. Will I be able to do it?" Krishna said: "Arjuna, do you not remember your Pasupata? You performed tapas for it on the mountain called Indrakila. You got it from the Lord Sankara. You must use it against Jayadratha in the battle tomorrow. For the succes of your oath, pray in your mind to Sankara. He will justify his name. You will be able to kill Jayadratha."

Hearing the words of Krishna, Arjuna purified himself by touching pure water with his hands. He sat on the ground and thought of Sankara. He went to Sankara in his mind. A strange thing happened. Arjuna saw himself flying in the sky with Krishna. They were travelling faster than the mind. Their course was as straight and swift as that of an arrow which had been shot from a bow. Krishna had caught hold of his right hand, and they were swimming together in space. They were proceeding towards the north. They passed many beautiful places. He saw the great mountain called Mandara. They

seemed to be going higher and still higher and finally they came to the mountain of silvery snow. There they saw the great Lord Sankara. Like a thousand suns shining at the same time, he was glowing, brightening the entire mountain with his radiance. They fell at his feet and adored him. Sankara was pleased with their worship and said: "What is your desire? I will grant it". Arjuna said: "I want the reputed Pasupata". Even as he was saying this, Arjuna looked in the presence of the Lord. He saw there the offerings he had made to Krishna that night. Sankara said: "There is a lake of nectar. There I have placed my own arrow and my bow with which I destroyed the asuras. You can go and get it from there". Some of the many attendants of Sankara went with them to the lake of nectar. There, in the lake, they saw a serpent which was deadly. On closer look they saw another which was spitting fire. It had a thousand heads. Then Arjuna and Krishna chanted the hymns from the Maharudra. The serpents changed their forms. They now became a bow and arrow. Arjuna and Krishna took them up in their hands with great reverence and went to Sankara.

Sankara smiled at them. Suddenly from his body there appeared a brahmachari who had red eyes and blue-black hair. He was fierce-looking. He took up the bow and the arrow. Arjuna watched the way he did it. He learnt from him the art of drawing the bow and fixing the arrow to it. Arjuna heard Sankara reciting the holy incantation for the Pasupata. The brahmachari now flung the bow and arrow into the lake from there. Arjuna now remembered the duel he had fought with Sankara on the Indrakila mountain. He had been granted a sight of the Lord with his consort Parvati. He realised they were in the presence of that same Sankara. They fell at his sacred feet once again and he smiled on them. With a great elation in their hearts, Krishna and Arjuna returned to their camp. This was the strange dream of Arjuna.

Chapter 13

THE FOURTEENTH DAY DAWNS

The fourteenth day of the great war dawned. It was the fourth day of the leadership of Drona. Yudhishthira got up early in the morning. He had finished all his morning worship. Krishna came to his tent. After him came all the lions on the side of the Pandavas. Yudhishthira asked Krishna: "Did you spend a pleasant night?"

Krishna smilingly replied: "Yes. And now, looking at your peaceful countenance, I know that there is nothing unpleasant that will ever happen to me". Bheema, Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki and Sikhandi, Nakula, Sahadeva and the sons of Draupadi, Chekitana, Dhrishtaketu, the Kekaya brothers, Yuyutsu and Ghatotkacha, Drupada and Virata came there too. Yudhishthira honoured all of them and then they began to discuss the plans for the day. It was not like other days. It was an important day in the lives of all of them.

Yudhishthira said: "Krishna, we are depending on you for everything. It is up to you to see us through this war with success at the end of it for all of us. You must have thought out a way of making the oath of Arjuna come true. With you as his charioteer, my Arjuna is sure to succeed today like all other days". Krishna said: "There is no archer like Arjuna. There is no fighter like Arjuna. He is brave, he is skilful and he is a master of all the divine astras. Looking at his noble face and his panther-like walk, who can dare defy him, unless he has decided to die? I will do my best to help him to destroy the Kauravas. We will burn up their army today. I am sure there is to be a great loss in the army of Duryodhana. With the death of Jayadratha, their spine will be broken. They will realise that the oath of Arjuna is not just a string of words but a string of arrows which will be a noose of death. I have been watching the omens too. They speak well for our side and they spell calamity for Duryodhana. Please do not have any worry about Arjuna and the possible failure of his oath. I AM HERE. I will not let it fail. You can be sure of it, Yudhishthira".

Even as they were talking thus, Arjuna came to the tent of Yudhishthira. He fell at the feet of Yudhishthira and all those who were elder to him. Yudhishthira embraced him with affection and made him sit by his side. He said: "Arjuna, I can see from the happy expression on your face that success is sure to be yours today. You look strangely happy, and so does Krishna". Arjuna had still not got over the experience of the previous night. His dream was still vivid. He told them about it: about his meeting the great Sankara in his dream with Krishna. It was a thrilling experience for him and everyone who listened was overcome with emotion. They fell on the ground and worshipped the Lord. They were now sure that Arjuna would be able to keep his oath.

Great shouting was heard in the camp of the Pandavas. Everyone was excited at the thought of war. The conchs and trumpets made music. They all began to get ready for the war front. Satyaki and Krishna got into the same chariot and left the tent of Yudhishthira. They reached the tent of Arjuna. Krishna descended from his chariot.

His role was to be changed. He was the charioteer to Arjuna. Smilingly he took leave of Satyaki and proceeded to the stables. He washed the horses with loving hands. He placed their armours on the four white horses of Arjuna. The chariot was equipped with all the necessary weapons. He did it all with loving care. Fortunate indeed was Arjuna who was loved so much by Krishna that he should do these things for him. The ape banner was fixed and the great chariot was brought to the presence of Arjuna. Krishna got down from the chariot and went to Arjuna. He said: "The chariot is ready. Come, Arjuna, let us go". Arjuna had put on his golden armour. It was the gift of Indra and it could defy the onslaught of a thousand arrows at the same time. His golden crown fretted with heavenly gems was placed on his head. It was a magnificent sight these two presented: Krishna and Arjuna in the golden chariot yoked with the white horses which were famed throughout the world. The morning sun gleamed on the ape banner.

Krishna took up the reins in his left hand. The journey was on. The omens were all favourable to the Pandavas. Arjuna went to Satyaki and said: "Satyaki, in the excitement of the killing of Jayadratha we must not forget Drona's promise to Duryodhana that he will capture Yudhishthira. We must guard him. It is most likely that the acharya, seeing me advance towards the Padmavyuha, will come to our army front and try to capture my brother. I have great faith in you. I know your prowess. You are my equal in everything. You can replace me easily. Two important things have to be achieved today: the killing of Jayadratha and the guarding of Yudhishthira. We will do both the things. The omens predict success to our side. There is no need to worry about me. I am protected by the Lord, Krishna. There need be no worry about Yudhishthira since he will be protected by Satyaki, the cousin of Krishna and the disciple of Arjuna and his equal. I can go to the front with a mind free of all worries." Satyaki saluted his guru and said: "So be it. I will do what you command me to do. You can safely leave Yudhishthira in my hands".

The Kaurava army was ready to meet the advance of the Pandava army. The conchs and trumpets made deafening noise. Drona could be seen moving about in his chariot drawn by the chestnut-hued horses. He went to Jayadratha and said: "Do not be afraid. Bhoorisravas, Radheya, Aswatthama, Salya, Vrishasena, and Kripa will be with you at the back of the Suchimukhavyuha. There will be a hundred thousand horses and chariots and elephants in your army. It will be at the van of the army with my army. Not even the gods can get at you, guarded as you will be by these great warriors. Why then worry about Arjuna? Be easy in your mind. You will see the sun rise again

tomorrow". Poor Jayadratha felt slightly relieved. But the terror had not left his eyes, not entirely. Drona had arranged his army in the terrible triple formation. It was indeed formidable. No one had seen the like of it before. The Kauravas were sure that Arjuna would never be able to break into it.

Drona was standing guard over the Padmavyuha. At the opening of the Sakatavyuha was stationed Durmarshana, the brother of Duryodhana. He was a brave and powerful fighter. He was sure of defying Arjuna. He said: "I will check the advance of Arjuna today. I will curb his pride. Let him see today, the valour of Durmarshana".

CHAPTER 14

ARJUNA PLOUGHS THROUGH THE ARMY

From the Pandava camp could be seen the gleaming chariot of Arjuna. Brave as they were, the Kauravas could not help a momentary shiver as they heard the rattle of the chariot. To Jayadratha, who was just buried under the immense army which was to protect him, the sight of Arjuna was like the sight of Yama. He trembled in all his limbs. The golden armour of Arjuna was brilliant. His face was as terrible as that of death. The Gandiva glowed in the light of the morning sun. The chariot came to a halt at the open field. Arjuna took up the Devadatta and blew pure notes on it. It was accompanied by the notes of the Panchajanya. The noise had not ceased to strike terror into the hearts of the enemies even though they had become familiar with it for the last thirteen days. Everyday it seemed new like the sunrise which is the same everyday and yet different everyday. With a great glow of joy in his face, Arjuna said: "Krishna, go fast towards the spot where Durmarshana is stationed. I will break up his vyuha and enter it".

The chariot of Arjuna proceeded towards Durmarshana. There was a great meeting of the two warriors. The fighting was terrible. Arjuna was beginning to destroy the army. The heads of the warriors rolled off their trunks in quick succession. So easily was he doing it that it looked as though Arjuna was cutting flowers for the worship of Sankara who loved a garland of skulls. Arjuna was so fast with his bow and arrows. No one knew when he took the arrow in his hands: when he fixed it on the bow-string: when he drew the string and when he shot the arrow. It was not possible to watch the entire procedure.

The flight of the arrow could not be followed by the eye. The Kaurava army could not stand up against the onslaught of Arjuna. Many died, and those that were not killed began to run away from the field. Durmarshana had to flee from there.

Dussasana came with his elephant army. He accosted Arjuna. The Gandiva was making perpetual music. There was no pause even for a moment. The elephant army was routed in a matter of a few moments. Arjuna was wonderful. The smile on the face of Krishna became more and more pronounced. This irritated Dussasana. He was trying his best to fight a duel with Arjuna. But Arjuna's arrows were hurting him terribly. Arjuna said: "You talk brave words, Dussasana. Let me see if you are able to act up to them". Dussasana could not. He ran away. Arjuna had passed the first vyuha of the triple vyuha. He had destroyed the elephant army of Dussasana. The first vyuha had been destroyed.

Arjuna reached the outskirts of the Padmavyuha guarded by Drona. He came to the presence of Drona. He folded his palms together and said: "My lord, angry because of the death of my child, I have today decided to kill Jayadratha. I have come this far. You are my guru. I am like a son to you. In fact, there is no difference between me and your Aswatthama. You have said so once and I hope that you think so still. I am hoping that you will bless me and allow me to enter this formidable vyuha of yours. You must bless me as a father blesses his son". Drona smiled at him and said: "Arjuna, you cannot enter this vyuha without defeating me".

Arjuna rained arrows on his guru who was dear to him. The war was distasteful to him whenever he was forced to do these dreadful things. His grandfather, and now his guru. Even the fact that Drona was the main actor in the tragic drama of the previous day was not making Arjuna hate him. Drona was firm about defending his vyuha. He could not let Arjuna get past him. He could not afford to. Arjuna was equally determined to enter the vyuha. They fought furiously. Both were undaunted. Each could anticipate the other's move. It was fascinating to watch the two. Arjuna cut the bow of Drona and he hurt his horses and his charioteer. Drona fought back valiantly. The fight went on for a long time. Neither could defeat the other. Krishna was watching this fight for a while. Then he said: "Arjuna, I am afraid you will have to give up all thoughts of killing Jayadratha, if you tarry here longer, fighting with this guru of yours. The time is flitting past on the wings of speed. You are wasting time, every moment of which is precious. Abandon this man and proceed into the vyuha". Arjuna realised the significance of his words. He said: "You are right, Krishna. I cannot afford to spend my time on this duel". He asked Krishna

to do the needful. Krishna smilingly turned the chariot. It made a pradakshina round Drona. Arjuna smiled at his guru and said: "My lord, I have to go". His words were greeted by a sneering smile from Drona. He said: "What do I see, Arjuna? You are running away from the enemy without defeating him". Arjuna shouted back with a smile: "For the moment it is more profitable to think of you as my guru and not as my enemy. A father cannot be angry with his son and a guru cannot be angry with his pupil. I am on my way. Please wish me well". The words came to Drona borne by the breeze. Arjuna had gone far away into the vyuha without his permission.

Arjuna had lost valuable time in his duel with Drona. He fought furiously since he had to make up for lost time. With him went, as the protectors of the wheels of his chariot, Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas, the Panchala brothers. Ever since the war began, the two brothers had been always with Arjuna. Arjuna was challenged by Kritavarma, Sudakshina the king of the Kambhojas, and Srutayus. They had immense armies with them. Drona pursued Arjuna. He led the host of the Kauravas who had come to challenge Arjuna. The fight was the most amazing display of the prowess of Arjuna and of the heroes on the opposite side. Arjuna was able to withstand the arrows of Drona by invoking Brahma. The Brahmastra was able to cut up all the arrows which had been sent by Drona. Arjuna thought of destroying the army of Kritavarma. There was a duel between these two. Arjuna knew that he was one of the six men who had murdered his child. The fury could be seen in his fighting. Krishna was watching. He said: "Arjuna, time is passing. Do not hesitate to hurt this man. Do not show him any mercy. Forget the fact that he is my cousin. Cut him up cruelly. He deserves to be". Only a few moments more and Arjuna hurt Kritavarma so badly that he fainted away. The king of the Kambhojas was the next person he had to tackle. This was easier. Then came the king called Srutayudha. He was a great warrior. He was reputed to be invincible because of the famous mace he had with him. His attack was quite fierce. At the outset he began to harass Krishna and Arjuna. His mace was given to him by Varuna. Varuna had told him that no one could defeat him or kill him as long as he had this mace with him. If, however, he aimed his mace at a man who was weaponless the mace would prove to be a boomerang and kill the man who had sent it. Srutayudha was using this mace in his duel with Arjuna. Arjuna could not subdue him. Then, with his memory clouded because of the workings of fate, Srutayudha hurled his mace at Krishna. Krishna received it on his wide shoulders. It did not hurt him. But a terrible thing happened. The mace, angry with the king who had sent it against a weaponless man, turned against him. It

struck a fierce blow at Srutayudha and he dropped down dead, his body broken by the avenging mace belonging to Varuna.

Seeing this dreadful sight, Sudakshina, the king of the Kambhojas, attacked Arjuna again. They fought for a while. But Arjuna was terrible today. He killed Sudakshina with a sharp arrow which pierced his heart. There was panic in the army at the sight of the fall of two of their heroes. Arjuna was enveloped on all sides by the immense army of the Kauravas. But he was undaunted. He continued to destroy it. There was something so terrible in the systematic way in which he set about killing all the men.

Then came Srutayus and Achutayus. They were brothers. They were very good friends of the heroes who had been killed just then. They wanted to avenge their death. They began a furious attack. In the beginning Srutayus was very good. He made Krishna faint with the power of his arrows. The other brother hurt Arjuna with a sharp javelin. For a moment everyone thought that Arjuna had been killed. He stood up clinging to the staff of his chariot and began to fight again. He invoked the great Aindrastra to combat the rain of arrows from his enemies. Arjuna killed the two brothers. At the death of the four heroes of their army, the Kauravas lost all confidence. The soldiers began to run away. The progress of Arjuna was becoming easier every moment.

Chapter 15

THE GLORY THAT WAS DRONA

Duryodhana was watching the progress of Arjuna. He went to Drona and said: "Arjuna has entered the second vyuha. Nothing can be done about it. There is no one to impede his progress. Please make proper arrangements so that he may not kill Jayadratha. Your vyuha, my lord, was considered unbreakable. You were guarding it yourself. And yet this man has been able to penetrate it and get past you. It is a terrible thing that has happened. I am now nervous about Jayadratha. I am beginning to wonder if all the many precautions you have taken for his safety may prove futile. It has been a fact established beyond doubt that no one can get past you. It looks as though it is not true any more. I realise now, and only now, that my army is weak. In fact I feel that I have no army at all. I believed that you are capable of defying Arjuna. It was this belief which made me

make Jayadratha stay on. Or else he would have run away to his country. It looks as though I stopped him only to offer him up as a sacrifice to the God of Death. There is hope for one who has entered the jaws of death but not for my poor friend Jayadratha when once he falls into the hands of Arjuna. Please protect him. Please do not let him be killed by Arjuna".

Drona listened in silence until the tirade of Duryodhana was over. He then said: "I tried to keep him at bay. I tried to stop Arjuna from getting past me. But he was too quick. His horses are divine and his charioteer is Krishna. Before I could see the arrows despatched by Arjuna, his chariot had passed me by several hundreds of yards. I am not so quick. I am an old man and my progress is slow. I have another responsibility. I have promised to bring Yudhishthira to you as a captive. Arjuna is not there to protect him. I do not want to leave my vyuha and pursue Arjuna, foregoing my chance of capturing his brother Yudhishthira. Duryodhana, why should you not go and fight with Arjuna? Why should you not protect Jayadratha? You and Arjuna are equals in age and in many things. I feel that you ought to go to the front and accost Arjuna. You can avenge the death of all your friends who have been killed just now by Arjuna".

Duryodhana turned pained eyes on his guru. He said: "My lord, you are trying to laugh at me. He has passed you and he has proceeded towards the heart of the vyuha. You have not been able to stop him. How can I do what you have failed to do? I may be able to defeat Indra in single combat but not Arjuna. Under your very eyes was Kritavarma, our hero, beaten. You were standing there like Sankara with his Pinaka. But I saw that, even as you were looking on, Srutayudha, Srutayus, Achutayus and Sudakshina were killed, and their entire army destroyed. And you ask me to defy Arjuna. How can I do it? Please protect us".

Drona was sorry for him. He smiled at Duryodhana and said: "You are as dear to me as my son Aswatthama. I have your welfare in my mind. I will make it possible for you to defy the arrows of the gods even. I will make you able to defy Arjuna. I will bind on you an armour which is impenetrable. It is presided over by the lord of all creation, Brahma. I will protect you with it. You can then fight with Arjuna". Drona covered the king with the armour. It was the same armour which protected Indra in his fight with Vritra. Duryodhana was very happy. Drona sent him to the heart of the vyuha.

Arjuna was busy entering the heart of the vyuha. Duryodhana collected his personal army and planned to attack Arjuna. The army was pleased to see the king coming to their aid. Arjuna had proceeded half way. Duryodhana planned to go to the front of his chariot and

challenge him. Seeing the king in the van of the army, the others rushed to the spot.

In the meantime the Pandava army, led by Dhrishtadyumna, was advancing in a body towards the enemy troops. Drona was defending his vyuha. The meeting of the two armies was like the blending of the golden waters of the Ganga with the midnight blue of the Yamuna. The Pandava army could not face the fury of Drona. His reputation was at stake. Dhrishtadyumna was facing him. The two were equally matched. Actually, several warriors came to Drona's assistance. Some of the brothers of Duryodhana came. They all fought well. The army was melting under the fiery touch of Drona. Bheema and his brothers were met by Vivimsati, Chitrasena and Vikarna, the brothers of Duryodhana. Vinda and Anuvinda were there. Salya had come to attack Yudhishthira. Dussasana joined them with his army. He met Satyaki. Sakuni met the twins. Vinda and Anuvinda fought with Virata. Baahlika met Sikhandi. Ghatotkacha and Alambusa had one of their usual fights. All the other warriors were stationed round Jayadratha. His wheels were protected by Aswatthama and Radheya. He was guarded behind by Bhoorisravas and his army. Kripa, Sala and Durjaya were the others who were near him.

Baahlika was fighting with the brave Dhrishtadyumna. Then he fought with the sons of Draupadi. It was a grand fight. It looked like the conflict between the mind and the five senses. The other remarkable fight was the one between Satyaki and Dussasana. Satyaki was made to faint by Dussasana. After recovering from the faint, Satyaki fought furiously with him. Sakuni, as usual, ran away from the powerful twins Nakula and Sahadeva. Drona and Dhrishtadyumna were bent on destroying each other's army. In the duel between them, Drona was steadily gaining the upper hand. Suddenly Drona managed to kill the horses of Dhrishtadyumna, and his charioteer. His bow was cut and when he was helpless Drona was about to kill him with a powerful arrow. Satyaki came just in time to save his friend from the weapon of Drona. Seeing that he was baffled in his attempt, Drona turned on Satyaki with fury. Satyaki felt that thunderbolt after thunderbolt was being hurled at him by the commander of the Kaurava army. He found his attack to be so terrible. But he was not upset. He spoke to his charioteer: "This cruel man has taken up the dread profession of a kshatriya. He is not a born kshatriya. He is a brahmin. A brahmin is said to have great anger. A kshatriya is said to be very brave. Drona is a dreadful combination of both the qualities. He is the only refuge of Duryodhana and his friends. He is our only fear, since Yudhishthira has got to be protected by all

of us against his attack. You must proceed towards his chariot quickly. I must prevent him from getting near Yudhishthira".

The fight was on between the two. It was obvious to everyone that Satyaki had made up his mind to fight his best that day. He remembered the instructions of Arjuna too well. He defied all the arrows of Drona very skilfully. Drona was amazed at the valour of Satyaki. He thought to himself: "I have seen so much valour only in Arjuna, in Bheeshma, in my guru Bhargava and in Kartikeya. Satyaki is a great archer. The disciple of Arjuna is as great as Arjuna". Drona was all admiration for Satyaki. The archer in him had to admire Satyaki. The number of bows which Drona had to lose that day was countless. The entire army had stopped fighting. They were all watching the magnificent duel between the two great archers. Drona would send an astra and Satyaki would send the same astra. Drona was very angry with him. He sent the Agneyastra. Satyaki counteracted it easily by his Varunastra which quenched the fire which Drona's astra was emitting. The denizens of the heavens had all assembled to watch the wonderful sight. Nakula, Sahadeva, Bheema and Yudhishthira came to help Satyaki. Dhrishtadyumna and Virata, with the Kekaya brothers, joined them. On the other side there came Dussasana and several brothers of Duryodhana. The fight became general.

Chapter 16

ARJUNA'S HORSES ARE TIRED

The sun was slowly but steadily wheeling his way towards the west. Arjuna was now fighting against time. He was fighting with double the vigour he had shown at the beginning of the day. Wherever his chariot went, destruction followed in its wake. The skill of Krishṇa in guiding the horses was a pleasure to see. No one else's chariot could move as fast as that of Arjuna. It roared through the ranks.

But the horses of Arjuna began to look tired. They had been yoked to the chariot in the morning. They pulled the chariot with difficulty. They were thirsty and very tired. They had been wounded too by the many arrows which had been shot at them. Since they were divine these horses could not be killed. But they were tired. Still they passed through the ranks valiantly. It could be seen that the chariot of Arjuna had lost speed. Seeing it, the Kauravas were happy. The spot where Jayadratha was stationed was still far away. The sun had

begun to slope slightly towards the west. The horses of Arjuna were tired and they could not go fast.

Seeing this, the brother Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti came and challenged Arjuna. They harassed him, Krishna and the horses too. Arjuna cut off their bows with two arrows. They took up other bows and continued to fight. On other days, perhaps, Arjuna would have kept up the fight. But today he was hard pressed for time. He could not afford to waste time in fighting duels. He cut off the head of Vinda with a sharp arrow. Anuvinda tried to avenge the death of his brother. He too was killed by the next few arrows. The angry host of the Kauravas fell on Arjuna. He was undaunted.

In the midst of the fighting, Arjuna spoke to Krishna: "Krishna, Jayadratha is still far away. My horses are fatigued. They have been hurt too much. They are not able to go fast. They must be rested. You must decide on what is to be done. Tell me what we should do now". Krishna said: "I have also been feeling the same thing. We must release them from the chariot for a while until they are refreshed. How shall we set about it?" Arjuna said: "I will fight on foot. You do the needful". Krishna agreed to it. Arjuna descended from the chariot. There was nothing flurried or hurried in his movements. The smile was on his face as though everything was normal. He stood with his Gandiva in his hand. He looked beautiful as he stood there, like Kama, the god of love with his bow made of sugar-cane. The Kauravas thought that this was the time to harass him. He had no chariot. He was standing on the ground, an easy target for all of them. So thought the Kauravas. They all surrounded him even as they did Abhimanyu the previous day. They had a surprise in store for them. Arjuna fighting on the ground was more terrible than Arjuna in the chariot. The army was absolutely helpless against the prowess of Arjuna.

In the midst of all this, Krishna came to Arjuna and said: "Arjuna, there is no water here. Without satisfying their thirst how can I yoke the horses to the chariot?" Krishna's words were heard by every-one there. Arjuna, with a smile, said: "But there is water! Look!" Arjuna took up his bow and arrow and, invoking Varuna, he shot an arrow into the ground. There then came into view a beautiful lake full of sweet clear water. The lake was bound on all sides by the arrows of Arjuna. He had built a pavilion with myriads of arrows. The army was amazed at the feat. Krishna was extremely pleased with this display of prowess by Arjuna. "Well done", said Krishna, and went to his horses to bring them to the lake. He released the grateful animals from the chariot. His eyes were wet when he looked at the dear animals. Very gently he pulled out the many arrows which

had been lodged in their bodies. The entire army was watching the performance with wonder and admiration. Arjuna was fighting on foot all the time. He was very cool. The Kauravas were all admiration for Arjuna and Krishna. They said: "What a miracle! In the midst of the field has been created a lake. With a single arrow Arjuna has been able to do this. The water birds have begun to collect in the sky at the sight of the lake". No one was interested in fighting. They were all watching Krishna as he tended the horses. The smile on the face of Krishna was bewitching. He looked as though he were in the midst of his Gopis in Gokula and not in the midst of warriors who were bent on killing Arjuna. His calmness upset the morale of the Kauravas. Without showing any flurry, Krishna stroked and massaged the horses. Even as the Kauravas were looking on, he spoke to the horses gently and made them relax. They were rested for a while. Krishna was skilled in the art of handling horses, and his loving touch was enough to cure them of all fatigue. He made them drink water to their hearts' content. Coolly he yoked them again to the chariot. They looked as fresh as newly opened flowers. Krishna brought the chariot to Arjuna and stood it in front of him. Quite some time was spent in this incident but it was essential for the horses. It also helped to impress on the enemies the fact that Krishna and Arjuna were not worried about the waning of daylight. It looked as though they did not care about the passage of time. They were so sure of their winning. This had a great effect on the army.

Arjuna ascended the chariot. They hurried to the spot where Jayadratha was stationed. Their speed was greater than that of wind. Killing the army on either side, they proceeded like a forest conflagration which spreads, aided by the wind. They reached the end of the vyuha: the formidable Padmavyuha of Drona. They were to enter the last vyuha. The Kauravas thought that Arjuna would not be able to cross the several vyuhas. But these two had managed to do the impossible. The sons of Dhritarashtra were desperate. They all surrounded these two. The progress of the chariot was also impeded. Arjuna just smiled at Krishna. They did not care for the obstruction. They passed them all by. Arjuna had passed Durmarshana and Drona the terrible. He had passed Kritavarma and he had destroyed all the kings who had dared to cross him. He had now almost reached the end of the journey. It looked certain that Jayadratha would be killed. Krishna and Arjuna could now see him. He was terrified and they were jubilant.

Looking at these two proceeding at such a fast rate, Duryodhana came in front of them with a desire to protect Jayadratha. He had the armour of Drona to protect him. He stood in front of the chariot

of Arjuna. Krishna said: "Arjuna, the lord of the Kauravas, Duryodhana himself, has come and wants to fight a duel with you. You must be careful. He is a powerful opponent. His arrows can travel a long distance. He is hard to fight. He will justify his name. Duryodhana is a great fighter on the chariot. He has been brought up in the lap of luxury. He is very proud and highly sensitive. He is a great hater of the five Pandavas. He is now very angry. He is desperate too. A desperate man will fight ten times as well as he does ordinarily. Duryodhana is the root cause of all the many sufferings of the Pandavas. I cannot understand his asking for a duel with you after seeing you in action. Arjuna, see that he loses his arrogance. Drunk with power, he has never known what suffering is. He has never met you, so far, in a duel. Let him see what it is to oppose the great Arjuna in a duel". Arjuna said: "I am pleased too, to see this man who has been the cause of all the many sufferings of Yudhishthira. I must avenge those wrongs". The two were very excited at the thought of fighting with Duryodhana. They were surprised to see that he was just as eager to fight. He was also just as excited. The entire army of the Kauravas was so pleased to see their king take up their cause and fight with Arjuna. Duryodhana was smiling all the while. He spoke to Arjuna: "Come, Arjuna. I have been hearing so much about the many astras you have at your command. Let me see some of them. Try and fight with me now". Duryodhana began the attack. He sent several sharp arrows which had the power of piercing even steel. They were so strong. He hurt both Krishna and Arjuna. Before Arjuna could return them several more were sent by Duryodhana.

Krishna said: "I have never felt so much pain before. These arrows of Duryodhana are terrible". Arjuna was very angry with Duryodhana. He sent several arrows which were like snakes. They literally hissed out of his bow. But they were powerless against Duryodhana. All the arrows of Arjuna were powerless. They could not hurt Duryodhana. Krishna said: "Arjuna, I am being harassed by this man. You are also hurt by him. Your arrows do not seem to have any effect on him. It looks as though he is the better fighter. Your hand has lost its skill: or perhaps, your Gandiva has lost its power of old. Evidently, fate is against us. The sun is fast proceeding towards the west. You are being defeated by Duryodhana of all people. Jayadratha is indeed fortunate since he has a good champion to fight for him. We may as well go back and admit defeat. Duryodhana is too good for you". Arjuna said: "Knowing everything, why do you taunt me, Krishna? You know as well as I do that this coward is not capable of standing in front of me unless he is sure of baffling me. Our great Acharya has placed on him the armour which

can defy all my arrows. It is a great armour. Of course no one can hurt the man who is wearing it. Only my guru and I know it. With the help of this borrowed armour Duryodhana has the courage to defy me. You know it well. Look now. I know the astra. which can break this armour. Indra, my father, has taught me that".

Arjuna fixed an arrow to his bow and invoked the Manavastra. The arrow was just about to leave his bow. Aswatthama, from a distance, broke that arrow into two. Arjuna knew that the acharya's son had guessed his intentions and baffled him in his attempt. The astra could not be used again. If it were, it would kill him who invoked it. He said: "The son of my guru has baffled me. Still, watch me harass Duryodhana. He knows nothing about this armour. He is wearing it as a woman would the armour which a man should. He is not at home in it. He is like a bullock which is carrying a precious load without knowing its worth". Arjuna sent a shaft and then another and then still another and attacked just the spots on the body of Duryodhana which had not been covered by the armour. The fingers of Duryodhana did not have the guards at the tips since it is necessary to leave the finger tips naked for shooting with precision. The palms were naked too. Arjuna shot arrows which entered the hands through the finger tips: through the nails: through the palms. Racked with torture, Duryodhana fled from the field. Laughing with amusement, Krishna and Arjuna proceeded very fast towards Jayadratha. The sun was nearing the west at a dangerously fast rate. Time was indeed very precious. They had to count the moments. Their chariot was fleeing towards the Suchimukhavyuha. They wanted to reach the presence of Jayadratha in a few moments.

Krishna was in a fix. A whole crowd of chariots and warriors surrounded their chariot on all sides. They were still two miles from the spot where Jayadratha was stationed. Krishna said: "Arjuna, I want some cheering up. Draw the string of the Gandiva and twang it as loudly as you can. I will also blow my Panchajanya. That will make these men afraid, and it will exhilarate me". There arose the twang of the bow called Gandiva. Drowning that noise rose the sound of the great Panchajanya. Krishna's face was covered with dust. His face was looking very tired. The sound of the Panchajanya seemed to split the sky with its blasts. The protectors of Jayadratha saw that Arjuna had advanced too near to their liking. There was a terrible assault by the Kaurava heroes. Bhoorisravas, Sala, Radheya, Vrishasena, Kripa, Salya and Aswatthama together attacked Arjuna. Eight of them fought against one. They had their army too with them. The fight was terrible. They all blew their conchs and attacked Arjuna. Aswatthama's arrows were returned to him tenfold. Radheya was

harassing Arjuna, along with Vrishasena and Salya. Never had Arjuna fought so well as he did then. They were each one of them wounded by the arrows of Arjuna. The fight went on for a long time. The sun was imperceptibly sailing towards the western hill. Krishna and Arjuna were very much worried. But they would not show it. Arjuna fought desperately, and the opposite side was equally desperate.

CHAPTER 17

YUDHISHTHIRA'S FEARS

In the meantime, the fight with Drona was going on in the Pandava army. A duel was fought between Yudhishthira and Drona. It was a wonderful sight. Yudhishthira was excelling himself. He wounded Drona severely. He covered him with his numerous arrows and once he threw a Sakti which was terrible like the thunderbolt of Indra. The onlookers thought that Drona was sure to be killed by it. Drona had to use the Brahmastra to stop the Sakti. He went towards the chariot of Yudhishthira. When he was quite near, Drona threw a mace at Yudhishthira. Yudhishthira threw one of his, and the two maces clashed against each other and fell on the ground. There were sparks of fire which had been caused by the terrific impact. Drona broke the banner of Yudhishthira. He killed his horses. He tried to break the chariot. Yudhishthira had to jump down from the chariot to save himself. Drona saw him on the ground without a chariot, without anyone by his side. He made him faint by sending an astra which made all the army faint in a moment. Drona rushed towards Yudhishthira like a lion towards a lamb which is unprotected. There was great tumult in the army. They were all sure that Drona had captured Yudhishthira. Satyaki came there just in time. Yudhishthira leaped into his chariot, and Satyaki bore him away from there.

Drona was baffled again in his attempt to capture Yudhishthira. This was the third time this had happened. On the first day he had nearly succeeded, and Arjuna came in time. On the second day too, Yudhishthira had been almost caught. But he had run away from the field, and a later attempt could not be made because of the appearance of Arjuna. Today, Satyaki, the student of Arjuna, had saved Yudhishthira from his hands. It looked as though all his attempts were doomed to be failures. Drona was very disappointed and very angry. He was sorry he could not please Duryodhana. The fight became general once

again. One of the Kekaya brothers, Brihadkshatra by name, was hurt by one of the warriors on the side of the Kauravas. His name was Kshemadhurti. They fought for a long time and Kshemadhurti was killed by Brihadkshatra. Viradhanva, a Trigarta, was causing great harm to the army of the Pandavas. After destroying a portion of the army, he came and accosted Dhrishtaketu, the king of the Chedis, who was a great asset to the Pandavas. He fought a terrible duel with Viradhanva and finally killed him with a powerful javelin. Satyaki, Nakula and Sahadeva were in the front. No one could fight with them without running away or being killed. Again there was a duel between Drona and Satyaki. The sons of Draupadi were in excellent form. The king Sala could not stand the onslaught of these five young men. They fought for a long time. In the end, the son of Sahadeva killed Sala. Bheema fought a duel with Alambusa and defeated him. Alambusa and Ghatotkacha fought a very good duel. Each revelled in outwitting the other with his illusory fight. Alambusa began to harass all the warriors on the side of the Pandavas. Ghatotkacha fought with him for a long time. When he saw Alambusa harassing the army, he thought it was time he was killed. The duel had assumed a dreadful aspect. It was a gruesome sight. They had given up their maya fighting now. They were engaged in a wrestling bout. It reminded Yudhishthira of the fight Bheema had with Hidimba years back. It was amazing how much Ghatotkacha resembled Bheema. Everyone was watching the duel with great excitement. Finally Ghatotkacha descended on Alambusa like a hawk. He lifted up Alambusa and dropped him on the ground. His body was shattered to fragments. The great Alambusa, the friend of Baka, had joined the army of Duryodhana to avenge the death of his friend by killing Bheema. He was killed by the son of Bheema. There was a deafening shout from the Pandava host when this feat was performed by Ghatotkacha. The Kauravas were shocked to see the dead form of one of their most powerful fighters.

Yudhishthira embraced Ghatotkacha. Bheema was immensely pleased with the valour of his son. It was then that they heard the sound of Krishna's Panchajanya. Krishna had blown the Panchajanya so loudly that the twang of the Gandiva was drowned. Krishna had done it deliberately. He saw that the army which surrounded their chariot could not be destroyed within the time limit they had imposed on themselves. He wanted someone to tackle the army. Hence this manoeuvre on his part, without letting Arjuna know about it. His purpose was achieved. Yudhishthira heard the sound of the Panchajanya without hearing the twang of the Gandiva He became extremely worried about the welfare of Arjuna. He then heard the noise made

by the conchs of the Kaurava heroes. He was sure that something terrible had happened to Arjuna and that the blowing of the Panchajanya was a cry for help.

Yudhishthira rushed to Satyaki and spoke to him about his fears. He said: "You must now help us. Satyaki, you are interested in the welfare of the Pandavas. You are dear to Arjuna, and he loves you as his brother. As for you, you worship Arjuna. I know that. You are just as famous and as great as Arjuna and Krishna. You must now proceed to the spot where Arjuna is being harassed, and help him. I can think of no one else who can be of help to Arjuna in this emergency which seems to have arisen. Once, in the Dwaitavana we were discussing the future and the war which would have to be fought. Arjuna said: "Satyaki has a light touch. He is a very graceful archer. He is highly intelligent. He will never lose his head in an emergency. He is my disciple. Satyaki is very dear to me. And I am very dear to him. For my sake he will do anything. He will set his life at stake and fight for me. Of all the heroes of the Vrishni House, barring Krishna, I will prefer Satyaki to Balarama, Aniruddha, even Pradyumna, or Gada who is my friend, or Sarana the brother of Subhadra, or Samba. I think very highly of Satyaki. I will take him on our side. He is enough to win this war". So spoke your guru and friend. As for me, Satyaki, I do not find any difference between you and my beloved brother Bheema. You must go immediately to the assistance of Arjuna. Do not worry about me. Bheema is here to take care of me. Look how Bheema and Dhrishtadyumna are melting the army of Drona. I am worried so much about Arjuna. I do not know if he is alive or dead. I think of the danger assailing him, and my mind is upset. I am thinking only of that dark handsome brother of mine. The dark curly-haired Arjuna is in trouble. Ever since the day dawned, he has been fighting alone. He entered the immense army all by himself. Because of this worry I cannot concentrate on fighting. I know that he is protected by Krishna the Lord of the universe. He can kill everyone, I know that. But still, the mind misgives me. I am terrified that his energy is failing him. The sun has begun to glow in the west. Please go at once to the help of Arjuna".

Satyaki spoke words of comfort to Yudhishthira. He said: "All that you say is true. I am more fond of Arjuna than I am of my life. You are as fond of me as you are of Nakula, Sahadeva, Bheema or Arjuna. But I must not go now. Arjuna is able to tackle the army of the Kauravas. I am not worried about that at all. I am worried only about you. Drona is terrible. Just before he left for the front, Arjuna entrusted me with the task of guarding you. You know the promise of Drona. He will try his best to capture you. Just

a while ago, he had done it almost. I must stay by your side like a mother by her child. If something happens to you after my departure, I will never forgive myself and Arjuna will never speak to me after that. Barring Pradyumna, there is no one equal to me in the art of fighting with all the divine astras which Drona has at his command. Please do not worry about Arjuna, my lord. He is safe. The moment I leave you alone, Drona will sweep down on you like a hawk, and I dare not think of what may happen. There is no one to protect the wheels of your chariot. Bheema, Dhrishtadyumna and I are protecting you. If I go away, the task will be too heavy for the other two. I do not want to go". Yudhishthira said: "All that you say is true. But my mind is thinking of only Arjuna. I will be very carefully guarded by the other two. I am not afraid. I have Bheema, Dhrishtadyumna, the sons of Draupadi, the Kekaya brothers, Ghatotkacha, Virata, Drupada, Sikhandi, Nakula, Sahadeva, Dhrishtaketu, Kuntibhoja and all the army. Do not have any worry. You must go".

Satyaki was in a real fix. He had to agree to the suggestion of Yudhishthira. He did not want to leave him and go. But then, he was afraid that people would call him a coward if he did not go to the assistance of Arjuna. His voice was choked with tears. He said: "My lord, I hate to leave you and go. But I will go. May the Lord protect you. Now that I have decided on joining Arjuna, my heart is singing. I will be so happy helping the greatest man that ever was born on this earth. I love Arjuna as I have not loved even my father. He means so much to me. I am happy to go and join him. I stayed on here since he had asked me to. But now you, my dear elder brother, have commanded me to go. I will certainly obey you. Krishna is prepared to lay down his life for the Pandavas, and Satyaki is just as eager to do the same. I will now proceed towards the Suchimukhavyuha of Drona and kill all those who are in the way of Arjuna. I know that Jayadratha is buried in the heart of that immense army which is roaring like the ocean at the sight of the full moon. I will just wait till my horses are refreshed and yoked to my chariot. I have a long way to go and the horses cannot afford to get tired".

Satyaki equipped his chariot for the fight ahead of him, even as Arjuna did in the morning. Satyaki had had a hard day till then, fighting more than one duel with Drona. Once he had to rescue Dhrishtadyumna and once he was just in time to prevent the capture of Yudhishthira. Both the times Drona fought furiously with Satyaki. They had fought after that too. But Satyaki did not mind the fatigue to the body. His mind was exhilarated at the thought of the great feat he would have to perform today in order to reach Arjuna and his troubles. Arjuna had gone so far away from him. There were two

vyuhas to cross before he could reach Arjuna. The first was comparatively easy. Arjuna had almost destroyed it. But the second was being guarded by Drona. But Satyaki was sure of his own prowess. He would be able to do it. His horses had been refreshed and rested. They were yoked to the chariot. His charioteer was the brother of Daruka. Satyaki's banner was the lion. He now looked beautiful. He had just refreshed himself with a bath and he was wearing a garland of lovely flowers. He had drunk wild honey to give him new energy. He ascended the chariot after saluting Yudhishthira and taking the dust of his feet. He looked just like Krishna with his beautiful smile and well-clad figure. Yudhishthira sent Bheema with him so that he could accompany him for some distance. The chariot of Satyaki began its journey.

After going some distance, Satyaki stopped his chariot and spoke to Bheema: "I am going to Arjuna's help because Yudhishthira is worried about him. Arjuna had placed the burden of Yudhishthira's safety on my shoulders, and I now place it on yours. I know that you are capable of guarding Yudhishthira. Hence I am without worry. Bheema, be very careful about the attack of Drona. Now that I am going, he will hurry to your presence and try to snatch Yudhishthira under your very eyes". Bheema said: "Yes, I know it. It is a difficult task. But rest assured. Dhrishtadyumna and I will be able to guard our brother. Go now, Satyaki. It is getting late." The two friends embraced each other and parted. Bheema stood watching the chariot of Satyaki as it bore him away. Dhrishtadyumna had already stationed himself by the side of Yudhishthira. He said: "Satyaki will return with glory. The omens are all favourable to us. Let us prepare ourselves for the attack of the furious brahmin who is waiting for his death at my hands".

CHAPTER 18

THE PROWESS OF SATYAKI

Satyaki followed the path which Arjuna had taken in the morning. The army attacked him furiously. They knew that he was not an easy person to defeat. They were bent on preventing him from entering the vyuha. But he killed everyone with great speed. Drona saw the devastation caused in the army by Satyaki. He hurried to his presence and challenged him. Satyaki was stopped when he came to the commander

of the Kaurava army. They fought for a while. The fight had no chance of ending. The two were furious with each other. They rained arrows and javelins, and it looked as though the fight would never end. Drona was smiling to himself all the while. He knew the object of Satyaki and he would not let him pass through to the presence of Arjuna. With a taunting smile Drona said: "Your beloved guru, Arjuna, played the coward when I met him. He would not fight with me. Admitting his defeat, he made a pradakshina to me with his chariot and went away. Your guru is such a coward. I will not let you pass me without your killing me or without any one killing you". Satyaki was amused by the easy way in which Arjuna had got the better of Drona. He said: "There is no greater glory for a student than to follow in the footsteps of his guru. I am only too proud to play the coward if my guru did it!" So saying, Satyaki turned the chariot, making a pradakshina round Drona, and hurried away from his presence.

Drona was furious. He followed Satyaki as fast as he was able to. Satyaki told his charioteer: "Go quickly. Drona will follow me. I must reach Arjuna as early as possible. Just ahead of me is the army of Baahlika. Beyond that is the army of the king of the south. By the side of the army of Baahlika is stationed the big formidable army of Radheya. Take me quickly there. Go towards the left side of the army. We will miss the army of Baahlika and meet the army of the south and that of Radheya". Satyaki, followed by Drona, was busy attacking the army of the south. He went to destroy also the army of Radheya. Satyaki was like Arjuna himself. People saw the same quickness of hand, the same coolness, the same smile, the same unruffled way of fighting. It was a great pleasure to watch him proceed, slaying the army ruthlessly. Kritavarma came and stood in front of the chariot of Satyaki. Satyaki did not care who came in front of him. He fought gloriously with Kritavarma. He was hurt terribly by the arrows of Kritavarma. His body was covered with blood. Satyaki was very angry with his cousin for attacking him. He hurt Kritavarma with his keen arrows. He harassed him. He covered him with his many arrows. Satyaki then took up a javelin and hurt the charioteer of Kritavarma. The charioteer was killed and he fell out of the chariot. The horses tried to bolt. But Kritavarma took the reins in his left hand and fought with his right. But before he could compose himself and resume his attack, Satyaki had gone quite some distance.

Kritavarma attacked the Pandava army which had Bheema and the others in the front. His anger against Satyaki was still fresh in his mind. His fighting was therefore more than good. It was impossible for the Pandava host to bear his onslaught. The army was scattered by him. Bheema, Sikhandi, Dhrishtadyumna, all were hurt by

Kritavarma. He routed the army of the Pandavas. They had to flee in all the directions, unable to face the great Kritavarma. Satyaki had now reached the boundary of the army of Kritavarma. He had crossed another river. First the river called Drona and now Kritavarma. Many of the great heroes accosted him and tried to impede his progress. But they might as well have tried to stop the fire from burning up a pile of dried leaves. Satyaki had reached the elephant army led by Jalasandha. The army was being destroyed at a fast rate. The field was quickly strewn with the carcasses of the immense elephants. It looked as though Bheema had been at work on the army and not Satyaki. Jalasandha approached the chariot of Satyaki. It was not an easy task to fight with Jalasandha. His arrows and javelins had been despatched with great force. One of the javelins hurt Satyaki in his left arm. Satyaki rained a large number of arrows at Jalasandha. Jalasandha threw a sword at Satyaki. It cut his bow and fell on the ground. Satyaki took up another bow. He fixed three deadly arrows. They followed each other very quickly. The first two cut the arms of Jalasandha and the third his head.

Satyaki now proceeded faster than before. Drona came back to harass Satyaki. He had with him several of the brothers of Duryo-
dhana and the king too. They all attacked Satyaki. Duryodhana
fought very valiantly. He broke the bows of Satyaki one after another.
He hurt him too. But Satyaki was undaunted. He felled the standard
of the king. He killed the horses of the king's chariot and he made
Duryodhana flee from the field. Seeing this from a distance, Krita-
varma, who had just routed the Pandava army, came to the help of the
king. There was again a duel between Kritavarma and Satyaki. The
charioteer of Satyaki was hurt and he fainted in his chariot. Satyaki
caught hold of the reins and fought with one hand. He hurt the horses
and charioteer of Kritavarma. He shot terrible arrows at him. They
pierced the armour of Kritavarma and he fainted in his chariot afflicted
by the arrows of Satyaki. Drona came to challenge Satyaki. They
fought for some time. Satyaki hurt the charioteer of Drona too. He
saw the acharya taking the reins in his hand. Satyaki hurt the horses now.
Unable to bear the pain, the horses bolted, carrying Drona in the
chariot. They careered on the entire field. Drona gave up his fight
with Satyaki and went back to guard the vyuha from further attack
from the Pandavas.

Satyaki had gone further into the army of the Kauravas. No one
was able to stand the sight of this terrible man who was coursing
through their ranks like a river in full flood. It was not possible to
look at his glowing form. He was like the sun at midday. He hurt
the eyes of all who dared to look at him. He was in no way inferior

to Arjuna. So thought the warriors on either side. There came to him Sudarsana, a very good archer and fighter. He was well known for his ability to handle all the weapons. He fought a duel with Satyaki. But Satyaki was too good a fighter. He killed Sudarsana. This impossible feat made the enemy host fear him more than they feared Bheema or his son.

In a short time Satyaki had defeated Drona, Kritavarma and Duryodhana. He had killed Jalasandha and Sudarsana. He had made Drona run away from the battle-field, and also his cousin Kritavarma. As for the army which he had destroyed, there was no accounting for the many deaths. Satyaki had slaughtered the armies of the Mlecchas, of Kasi, the Nishadas, Tankanas, Kalingas, Magadhas, Kekayas, Kambhojas, Yavanas and Vasatis. He was going fast towards the spot where Arjuna was fighting with the guardians of Jayadratha. With his snowy white horses galloping through the ranks, he looked like Arjuna. The Yavanas tried to stop his progress. But he passed them soon. He was met again by Duryodhana and his brothers. They had with them a huge army. Satyaki was proving to be a holy terror. He had to be stopped. Satyaki shouted to his charioteer: "Look on this immense army of these men. It is coming with the intention of swallowing us. I will fight so wonderfully that my guru will be proud of me. I will today repay the debt of love I owe the Pandava I will show Duryodhana that there is no such thing as victory as far as he is concerned. I will make the earth drink the blood of these men who have become too lusty with their unrighteousness. I will prove to them that I am indeed the cousin of Krishna and the pupil of Arjuna. You just wait and see how this army is going to suffer". The fight was as he had predicted. The entire army was routed. The king had his charioteer killed, and the terrified horses bore him away from the field as in the case of Drona. It was just a matter of moments before the way was clear once again for Satyaki.

CHAPTER 19

YUDHISHTHIRA HEARS THE PANCHAJANYA

The Kauravas were furious. They had to stop Satyaki. It looked as though he was even better than Arjuna. He had destroyed a larger portion of the army than Arjuna had. Duryodhana and Dussasana sent a team of fighters who were skilled in warfare with stones. They

threw so many stones at him. But Satyaki could stop all the stones and break them with his arrows. He killed all of the fighters with his arrows. There was a great shouting and screaming from them as the men fell down dead. The elephants and horses which had been brought by the other warriors were being killed in large numbers. Drona heard the noise. He spoke to his charioteer: "Satyaki is today more terrible than Arjuna. I cannot fight with him at all. He has gone past me and Kritavarma. He is now harassing the army of Duryodhana. Take me to him. I will have to fight him again, though I have already fought innumerable duels with him today". The charioteer said: "Looking at the dead forms on the ground, and the devastation all over, what you say is right. It seems Satyaki is more powerful than Arjuna. But, my lord, he has gone too far. You will have to be here to guard the army from the onslaught of the Pandava army. I think it will be better if you stay here". Even as he was saying this, the army of the king, or rather what was left of it, was led by Dussasana who was coming straight to the presence of Drona.

Drona said: "What is this, young prince? Why have you come here now? Having left the king and Jayadratha, why do you come to me now? You are the yuvaraja. You are the favourite brother of the king. In the courts of Hastinapura you spoke such brave words. Now I find you here. I see that you cannot stand and fight against Satyaki who is just one against all of you. You send a thousand arrows at him and he is not killed. You then try to stone him to death. Still he is not killed. Where is your pride, and your arrogance, and your self-respect? Are you not ashamed of your cowardice? Why do you always depend on someone else to do your fighting for you? Why not fight, yourself, for a change? If the leader is frightened and runs away, how can he expect the army to be brave? You are setting a bad example to all the others. Today, looking at this warrior who is burning up your army, you are frightened and you run away. How are you going to face Arjuna and the great Bheema? Dussasana, do not think that this is the palace where the game of dice was played and the hall where the queen of the noble Pandavas was dragged to the court and insulted by you. You are, to a large extent, responsible for the growth of hatred in the mind of Duryodhana for the Pandavas. You cannot recognize the dice which have changed their forms and become arrows which are bent on destroying you. You would talk so proudly of the many things you would do to the Pandavas when the war came. Let me see you do it. You will soon meet the Pandavas in fight. The very fact that you fled away from the battle-field shows that it will not be very long before Yudhishthira is installed as the monarch. Or else, if you want to live, go to your brother and confer

with him. Return their kingdom to the Pandavas and live in your palace with the women round you. You can tell them how bravely you fought in the war. Do it before Bheema kills you and drinks the blood from your heart. I warn you. You are sure to die. Die bravely. Do not let the world call you a coward. Go back to Satyaki. If you are a man, challenge him and fight with him. You are ruining the confidence of the soldiers. You are supposed to be so brave. If you behave like this, what can your poor army do? Go back and fight".

Dussasana had the grace to look ashamed. He spoke nothing. He went and fought with Satyaki. He was quite brave and skilled too. But Satyaki was too good for him. Very soon Dussasana was without his bow and without a chariot. Satyaki could have killed him then. But he did not want to shatter the dream of Bheema. He left Dussasana and went away.

Drona had been trying again and again to attack the Pandava army. Dhrishtadyumna and Bheema were always guarding Yudhishthira. After the departure of Dussasana, Drona tried once again to harass them. Some of the sons of Drupada were killed. Dhrishtadyumna brushed away his tears and came to avenge their death. There was a duel. During the duel, Dhrishtadyumna made the great Drona faint in his chariot. Seeing him unconscious and at his mercy, Dhrishtadyumna left his own chariot and jumped into that of Drona. He took out his sword and tried to cut off the head of Drona. But Drona recovered just in time. Dhrishtadyumna was disappointed. The duel continued. Dhrishtadyumna was defeated. Drona went back to the Kaurava army and took up his stand as the guardian of the army. The King came with his brothers and fought with the Pandava host. He was fighting excellently. He accosted Bheema, Dhrishtadyumna, Nakula, Sahadeva and Bheema, with Yudhishthira. He was in very good form. He was not frightened either. Drona came to his aid. It was a fairly long fight. Drona fought with Brihadkshatra, the eldest of the Kekaya brothers. The Kekaya was winning the admiration of the warriors on both the sides by his excellent markmanship. Drona was very angry with him. He sent the Brahmastra. To the great delight of the Pandava brothers, Brihadkshatra counteracted it by sending the Brahmastra himself. Drona's anger was now terrible. He hurt the Kekaya with many sharp arrows and, in the end, with a single sharp arrow he killed Brihadkshatra. Seeing this, Dhrishtaketu, the son of Sisupala, rushed on Drona. But after a duel of a high order he was killed by Drona. The son of the great Jarasandha was the next to be killed by Drona. The next to be killed was Kshatradharma, the son of Dhrishtadyumna. It looked as though the entire host of the Pandavas was doomed to be destroyed by Drona.

In the midst of all this, Yudhishthira was thinking of only one thing: his eyes were seeking only one thing: Arjuna. He looked in all directions and could not get even a glimpse of the banner of Arjuna. He could not hear the music of the Gandiva. He had sent Satyaki. There was no sign of him either. His worry had become double now. He was upset by the thoughts about the three, Arjuna, Krishna and Satyaki. He thought: "I am frightened about the fate that may have overtaken Satyaki. I should not have sent him alone into the vyuhas of Drona. I do not know what has happened to him. He was already tired when he set out on this dangerous mission. He had fought too many duels with Drona. I must send some one else to the aid of Satyaki. I will ask Bheema to go". Yudhishthira asked his charioteer to take him to Bheema. He said: "Bheema, it is so long since Arjuna went to the front. There is no sign of him anywhere." Bheema smiled and said: "My dear brother, it is not right that you should worry about Arjuna of all people. If you become so weak with fear, what are we to do? Tell me what I should do".

Yudhishthira's eyes were full of tears. He said: "Arjuna has not come back. In my worry about him I sent Satyaki. I do not know what has happened to them all. It is quite some time since he went. I do not hear any cheering noise from the front. I can only hear the shouts of the Kauravas. I am not able to think of anything else. I am sure that my brave Arjuna has been killed by the many warriors as Abhimanyu was yesterday. I am sure I have sent Satyaki to his death. When Arjuna is dead, do you think Satyaki will be allowed to live? Yesterday I sent Abhimanyu to his death. Today I have sent Satyaki to his death. I want you, Bheema, to go and find out what is happening there. If you see them alive, give forth your war-cry like the roar of a lion and I will hear it and rest in peace. Listen, can you not hear the noise of the Panchajanya now? I cannot hear the twang of the Gandiva. I am sure that Arjuna is dead. Krishna is fighting now, to avenge the death of his beloved friend. I am sure of it. In the name of the respect you have for me as your elder brother, I ask you to go and find out what has happened to them". Bheema smiled at the fears of Yudhishthira. He said: "When Krishna and Arjuna enter the army, there can be nothing but victory for them. Satyaki cannot come to harm either. But I will obey your commands. I will go now and find out what is happening. Wait for my war-cry".

CHAPTER 20

BHEEMA'S DUEL WITH DRONA

Bheema went to Dhrishtadyumna and said: "My brother is worried about Arjuna and Satyaki. I do not think it is wise to leave him and go now. But he insists on my going. I have to go. I will go to the place where Jayadratha is even now waiting for his end. Dhrishtadyumna, you have to bear the burden alone now. I hope you will be able to baffle this Drona. I am afraid for Yudhishthira". Dhrishtadyumna embraced his dear friend and said: "Do not worry, Bheema. I will stake my life and fight for the safety of Yudhishthira. Drona can take him captive only after killing Dhrishtadyumna, and Dhrishtadyumna cannot be killed by Drona since he has been born to kill Drona. Go in peace. I will take care of our army and our king too". Bheema took leave of his brother and set out towards the battle-field. They heard the blare of the Panchajanya once again. Bheema set out with all speed to help his brother and his friend Satyaki.

Seeing Bheema set out, Drona set his horses in the direction of the Padmavyuha and stationed himself at its entrance. The moment he left the Pandava host, Bheema was accosted by a team of warriors. They were all the brothers of Duryodhana, with Dussasana in the lead. Bheema was exhilarated at the sight of so many of the brothers of the king. He laughed at them and his war-cry rose up as he began to fight with them. Dussasana hurled a deadly javelin at Bheema, hoping that he would be killed by it. It was broken by Bheema when it was half way through. Bheema now set about killing them one by one. Seven of them were killed, bringing the total up to thirty-one. The rest of them surrounded him completely and began to harass him. Bheema was enjoying himself thoroughly. Ever since the morning he had been tied to the front of the army. This was not to his liking. Now he had been allowed to come into the heart of the army and the first fight was with the brothers of the hated Duryodhana. Bheema blessed Yudhishthira for having sent him along. He killed three more. The total came up to thirty-four. The rest of them ran away from his presence. Bheema had now to tackle Drona if he wanted to enter the vyuha.

Drona attacked the powerful Bheema with his arrows. He thought to himself that Bheema too would pay his respects to him as Arjuna and Satyaki had done. He said: "Bheema, you cannot enter this vyuha

without my permission or without defeating me. Your brother Arjuna was afraid to fight with me. He paid his respects to me and ran away from me without fighting with me and defeating me. He managed to get past me by wangling permission from me. I will not allow you inside this vyuha". Bheema laughed at him and said: "Listen to me. There is no one on this world or in the heavens who can defeat my brother. Arjuna asked for your permission not because he was afraid of you. He paid respect to you, because he still thinks of you as his guru: as one who deserves respect. But remember I am Bheema and not Arjuna. There was a time when I had immense respect for you. You were once a person who could demand respect from us. You were like a father to us. You were our well-wisher, our acharya who meant so much to us. We were all thinking of you with so much respect and affection. But now, all that respect is gone. You are the well-wisher of Duryodhana and you are our enemy. The moment you promised to Duryodhana that you would capture my brother and give him up as a captive so that there may be another game of dice played, my respect for you as my guru died in a flash. You saw the game played once and yet you are willing to let it be played again. I am not your pupil anymore. Nor are you my guru. You have joined the enemies. You are the well-wisher, as I said before, of Duryodhana. You have announced yourself to be an enemy. You will get the treatment due to an enemy. I am not Arjuna who is too fond of things of the long ago. I am Bheema, the enemy of the sons of Dhritarashtra and of all those who fight for them". Bheema's eyes were like live coals. He was mad with fury against the man who had dared to expect respect from him. Bheema jumped down from his chariot and ran towards Drona with his mace uplifted. Drona jumped out of his chariot just in time to save his life. The chariot and the charioteer were crushed beyond all recognition. The horses were dead too. Bheema, leaving the defenceless Drona behind, rushed towards the spot where Arjuna was fighting.

The path had been made easy for Bheema by Satyaki. Bheema went forward cutting his way through the enemy ranks. The elephant army came in for its share of destruction. Like the sun emerging from black clouds, Bheema came out of that huge army of elephants. Here Drona came in another chariot and challenged Bheema. Bheema had no more patience with Drona. He jumped from his chariot and dragged the chariot of Drona hither and thither. Drona was thrown off to the ground. He mounted another chariot and went away from Bheema to the outskirts of the vyuha. Bheema wiped his hands and with a smile got into his chariot. He went as fast as the wind towards the end of the vyuha. No one dared to come near him and challenge him.

He hurled a terrible mace at the enemy host and everyone fled at the sight of Bheema.

Bheema followed the path that had been cleared by Satyaki. He had come to the end. There he saw Satyaki fighting. Bheema hurried past him and went further to get a glimpse of Arjuna. He went on. Suddenly he saw Arjuna. It *was* Arjuna! There then came a cry of triumph from the throat of Bheema which was like the roar of a monsoon cloud. It was heard all over the field. It resounded in all the four quarters. Bheema had given the signal which Yudhishthira had asked him to give. His mind would have no more worries now. Bheema shouted with joy. On hearing his war-cry, Arjuna and Krishna were thrilled. They shouted out in return. They were eager to have a look at the brave Bheema who had come so far into the field. Yudhishthira heard all the three voices, first the roar of Bheema and then that of Arjuna and Krishna. He was happy. He was so happy; he cried with relief. He told himself: "Arjuna is alive. Bheema, the dearest of all my brothers, has always pleased me, and today he has pleased me as he has never done before. Satyaki is alive and Arjuna with Krishna is alive. There is no one so fortunate as I am".

Bheema's war-cry proved to the Kauravas that the Pandavas were coming to the help of Arjuna. It was necessary to do something to prevent the help from reaching Arjuna. Satyaki had come up, and now Bheema. Arjuna was there already. This trio led by Krishna would be formidable indeed. Radheya came to challenge Bheema. Bheema's cry of challenge was irritating him beyond measure. Radheya began the attack with a number of sharp arrows. Laughingly, Bheema waived them aside with his own. He covered Radheya with a cloak of arrows. People were amazed at the sight. They had not seen the dexterity of Bheema with the bow so far. He was famed for his attack with the mace and for his wrestling. This was something wonderful. He cut the bow of Radheya. Radheya took up another bow and continued the fight. He was smiling all the while, like an indulgent father at the cleverness of his child. They presented a good contrast. Radheya was cool and his method had so much polish. Bheema's shots did not have the finish, that excellent finish for which Radheya was famous. Bheema showed his anger too. Radheya was unruffled. He looked just like Arjuna, as he stood there with a taunting smile on his lips. The smile infuriated Bheema. Bheema wounded him with his arrows. A frown of annoyance passed across the face of Radheya but he did not lose his poise. Bheema cut the string of the second bow of Radheya. His horses and his charioteer were wounded too and Radheya jumped into the chariot of his son Vrishasena. Bheema was very pleased with him-

self for having defeated Radheya. He shouted again since he was now free to go to Arjuna.

Radheya came back. He was almost gentle in his attack. Bheema thought that he was not so good a fighter as he was reputed to be. But Radheya was gentle because his heart was not in the fight. He remembered that Bheema was his brother and this was his first duel with him. He had fought with Arjuna. But Arjuna was different. Radheya's heart was full of affection for this wild and hearty brother of his. He wished that he were able to jump down from his chariot and embrace Bheema and say: "Let us not fight. We are brothers. I am also the son of Kunti. Come, let us go to our brother Yudhishthira". Poor Radheya knew that it was just a dream of the heart. These feelings of love made him soft in his fight with Bheema. The fight became more impassioned. Radheya had no time to continue his reverie. He had to protect himself from this powerful Bheema. Again Radheya lost his chariot, and Duryodhana sent Dussala to Radheya with a chariot. Radheya got into the chariot and began to fight. Bheema cut the head of Dussala. Radheya was beginning to get worried about Bheema.

Duryodhana was watching the havoc caused in his army. He rushed to Drona who was stationed at the opening of the vyuha. His eyes were wild with desperate fear, and anger against the acharya. He said: "My lord, you had promised to us that you would not let anyone get past you. Now three of them have come to the very edge of your vyuha. Arjuna, Satyaki and Bheema have destroyed a very large portion of the army. The three of them are going to attack Jayadratha. They are harassing all the heroes who have assembled to protect Jayadratha. How could they get past you? It is incredible. I can more easily believe that the ocean has dried up. How did it happen, my lord? How could it happen?" Drona had had enough and more of this nagging. He had done his best. But the king was not pleased with the selfless devotion of his men. He was always finding fault with him. Drona said: "What has been done cannot be undone. Think of the next important thing to do." Duryodhana said: "Jayadratha has got to be saved. Please make the proper arrangements. I am beginning to lose hope".

Drona was disgusted. He had done so much for the king, and here he was scolding him for allowing these three into the vyuha. His arrogance was intolerable. Gratitude was a feeling which was a stranger to the heart of Duryodhana. Drona had been busy since morning guarding the vyuha. Surely he could not help it if three people were able to get past him. He was keeping the entire army of the Pandavas at bay. They would have rushed at the Kauravas if it had not been

for him. He was doing something which was beyond the power of human beings, and yet Duryodhana was dissatisfied.

Drona was wild with anger. He said: "You are right. Three of them have managed to get past me. But remember your own responsibility and take proper steps to guard your precious brother-in-law. You have sworn that not a hair of his head will be touched. I have kept the entire Pandava army in check. You do not seem to notice that. Now you must do your duty and guard Jayadratha who is a coward of the worst type. With the help of the boon of Sankara, he was able to defy the Pandavas for a single day. But now he is like a boat which has been abandoned in mid-water. When you and Sakuni played the game of dice, there was no question of winning or losing. There was no thought of that. It was all just winning on your part. But now it is not so easy to win. There is a possibility of losing even for the great Duryodhana who has sworn to protect Jayadratha. It is evident that the dice which you used against the Pandavas have changed their forms and become cruel arrows which have turned against their owner. They are trying to make reparation for the sins they committed against Yudhishthira. Today the stake is the life of Jayadratha, and the dice is not loaded. There is no Sakuni in the court of God. You will just have to play the game. The result is uncertain. I have tried to do my best. I can do nothing more. You go there, and all of you do what you can. You are all great warriors. You are there, and Dussasana and Radheya are there. There are so many others. They have all decided to die for you. What more do you want? I have to stay here to prevent the army of the Pandavas from rushing on you all at once. It will not be possible to do anything after that. They are now just three against all of you. Go and do your best to save Jayadratha from the wrath of Arjuna".

Chapter 21

BHEEMA AND RADHEYA

Duryodhana went back. He saw Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas. Duryodhana decided to tackle them. He attacked both of them. He fought well and managed to hurt the horses of one of them: those of Uttamaujas. But there was no chance of Duryodhana's winning against the pair. He had to get into the chariot of Salya and leave the brothers. The fight was going on between Radheya and Bheema. Bheema wanted

to abandon Radheya and proceed towards the chariot of Arjuna. But Radheya would not let him go. His face was lit up by a charming smile. This smile of Radheya was making Bheema feel discomfited. He could not bear it. He fought as fearfully as he could. Radheya had broken the armour of Bheema. His fighting was effortless. His fingers had such precision and such sure aim. It was maddening for Bheema. He cut the bow of Radheya and hurt him on his broad chest. Radheya got into another chariot since Bheema had broken his, and went away from the presence of Bheema. In a few moments he was back again to challenge Bheema. His smile was gone and he looked very angry.

The brothers of Duryodhana thought that he was sure to kill Bheema this time. Bheema and Radheya fought as they had not till now. Bheema remembered all the sufferings of the Pandavas, and his mind was bent on killing this friend of his cousin. The bows of Radheya were broken again and again. Radheya was wounding Bheema without stopping. It was a terrible duel. Duryodhana was watching him. He spoke to his brother Durjaya. He said: "Durjaya, go and help Radheya. That animal is harassing him too much. Go and destroy him". Durjaya went there to help Radheya. He attacked Bheema. He did not know that the sight of a son of Dhritarashtra was the most wonderful tonic to the mind of Bheema. Bheema killed him in a matter of moments. Radheya's eyes rained tears at the death of a brother of the king. His chariot was again broken, and again he had to take another chariot. This was repeated many times. Radheya stood on the ground and continued to fight. Duryodhana sent his brother Durmukha. Radheya ascended his chariot. Bheema ignored Radheya and began to fight with Durmukha. With just nine arrows Bheema was able to kill him. Radheya was horrified to see that the brothers of the king were killed, all because they had come to his aid. It was making his tears flow continuously. For a while Radheya felt faint. He could do nothing. Bheema's arrows were breaking up his armour. Radheya was as angry as a serpent. He hurt Bheema in the left shoulder. The return of these hurts was terrible. It was not possible to bear the arrows of Bheema. Radheya had to go away from there. He was hurt too much and he was too upset by the killing of the brothers of the king.

Seeing that Radheya was made to go away, five of the brothers of Duryodhana rushed at Bheema. They were bent on destroying him. Durmarshana was one of them. Bheema smiled to himself as a lion does when a number of deer come within his reach. He killed all five of them. Radheya came back at the sight of the death of so many. The fight was now furious between Radheya and Bheema. It

was terrible to watch the two trying to destroy each other. Again Radheya lost his chariot, and again the foolish king sent some more of his brothers to help Radheya. Radheya had split the armour of Bheema. Bheema covered Radheya with his arrows. It looked as though he would not be able to emerge out of it. Radheya's armour had been broken. His right arm had been hurt. The brothers of the king came, and Bheema killed all of them. The score had mounted up to forty-nine. Radheya fainted away at the sight of the death of so many of his friend's brothers who had come to help him.

The fight went on. All who looked thought they were both like Arjuna. Both were just terrible. It made the hearts of Arjuna and Krishna and Satyaki glow with pride to see Bheema fight. The heroes on both sides were watching the duel. "Bravo! Excellent! Well done!" were the shouts from all the watchers: Bhoorisravas, Drona, Kripa, Salya, Satyaki, Arjuna, Krishna, Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas. Radheya was again beaten. Duryodhana sent some more of his brothers. It looked as though Duryodhana was trying to stem the oncoming tide with sand-dunes. Seven great warriors encompassed Bheema. But he laughed at them. With a cruel smile on his lips Bheema began to kill them one by one, without any compunction. Vikarna was one of the seven to be killed. It was only when he killed Vikarna that Bheema was sorry. He spoke to him: "Vikarna, I had taken an oath that I would kill all the sons of Dhritarashtra. I have to kill you though I do not want to. You were the one righteous man in that crowd of sinners. When Draupadi was in the court, insulted by your brothers and Radheya, only you were bold enough to speak in her favour. You were braver than our grandfather. But I have to kill you since I have sworn to do so. Curse this war and curse your brother for this".

The fight continued. Radheya was slowly gaining the upper hand. His fury against Bheema made him fight more furiously than before. He cut off the bow of Bheema and the reins of his steeds. He wounded the charioteer of Bheema. Bheema hurled a dart at Radheya It was cut by Radheya. Bheema took up a shield and that was broken too. Next, Bheema threw his sword at Radheya. That was cut to pieces. The old smile had come back to the face of Radheya. Bheema was without a chariot, without a bow and without any weapons. But he would not leave the field. He saw the carcasses of the elephants all around him. He began to throw them one by one at Radheya. He threw the shattered fragments of the many chariots, and anything that was within his reach served as a weapon. They were all futile. Radheya had him at his mercy. He could have killed him. But he remembered his promise to his mother Kunti that he would not kill any of her sons except Arjuna. So Radheya decided to let him go

unharmed. But he would insult him. Radheya came near Bheema. He touched him with the tip of his bow and said: "You are a fool and a glutton. Do not try to fight with heroes like me. You should either stay in the kitchen as you did in the palace of Virata or you must spend your days and years in the forest trying to collect roots and fruits. You are still a child. Go home, my child".

Krishna saw this. He said: "Arjuna, look! Look at the state of Bheema. Radheya has defeated him and now he is taunting him with his cruel words". Arjuna's chariot came near Bheema. The arrows of Arjuna began to harass Radheya. But Radheya turned his face away from him and went away from the presence of Bheema. Krishna knew that he was trying to hide his emotions from everyone. Arjuna returned to his place in front of the team which was guarding Jayadratha. Bheema got into the chariot of Satyaki and followed Arjuna. Arjuna was not prepared to let Radheya go so easily. He sent some arrows towards Radheya. These were intercepted by Aswatthama. Arjuna turned his attention to the son of his guru.

Chapter 22

BHOORISRAVAS

Satyaki had managed to reach the front. He had performed a great task. He had today destroyed the Kaurava army and he had come in time to help Arjuna. He was surrounded by a huge army headed by Dussasana. The fighting of Satyaki was a pleasure to watch. He looked as though he was dancing in his chariot. He stood where he was, but his arrows were flying in all the four directions. He crossed the entire army and advanced towards Arjuna. Krishna was the first to see him. He said: "Arjuna, your pupil Satyaki has come to you. He has crossed this entire army and reached you. You are very dear to Satyaki. You are dearer to him than his very life. He has baffled Drona and Kritavarma. Having performed tasks which sound incredible, Satyaki has at last come to your help". Arjuna was taken aback at the sight of Satyaki. His thoughts flew to Yudhishthira. He did not know what was happening to him. He said: "Krishna, I am not very pleased at the coming of Satyaki. It is hard to think that Yudhishthira is safe without Satyaki. I had asked him to be by the side of my brother". Krishna said: "Can you not see why he has come? Your brother must have been worried about you. He must

have been worried about your safety. He thought that something must have happened to you. He has therefore sent Satyaki to find out how you are and to help you. Whatever the reason may be, I, for one do not feel sorry at the sight of Satyaki. I am glad to see him".

While they were talking thus, Arjuna said: "Look, Krishna, Bhoorisravas is going towards Satyaki to challenge him to a duel. Bhoorisravas is entrusted with the guarding of Jayadratha. He has to stop Satyaki from reaching me. I have got to protect Satyaki from him. It is also evident that the sun is fast proceeding towards the west. Jayadratha has got to be killed in a short time. Satyaki looks very tired. He is exhausted. His charioteer and his horses too look very tired. Poor Satyaki, in his affection for the Pandavas, has been gambling with his life. How can I repay his love for me?" Krishna saw the tears in his eyes and was pleased with them. Arjuna was still talking. He said: "I can see that Bhoorisravas is anything but tired. But Satyaki is exhausted. But he has got to win this duel. I am angry with my brother for having exposed my friend to this danger". They were watching the duel between Satyaki and Bhoorisravas and, all the while, Arjuna was fighting his own battle.

Bhoorisravas had come and stood in front of the chariot of Satyaki. He said: "Now I have got a chance to fight with you. I have been wanting to fight this duel for a very long time. Unless you run away from the battle-field, you cannot escape me with life. I will today avenge the insult offered by your grandfather Sini to my father. Today you will see all your forefathers. Get ready to fight". Satyaki said: "Please do not be too sure of yourself. Remember you are talking to Satyaki and not just anybody. I am sure you are eager to fight with me and so am I. I too remember the ancient feud between your father and my grandfather. Let us fight. I do not believe in wasting time in idle words, like the autumn cloud which roars so much but never gives water".

There was an ancient feud between the two families. Soora, the father of Vasudeva, had a cousin named Sini. He was a very great hero. There was a swayamvara held for Devaki, the sister of Kamsa. Sini went to that swayamvara and carried away Devaki to make her the bride of Vasudeva. There was a powerful king of the Kuru House called Somadatta. He resented the act of Sini. Somadatta was the son of Baahlika and the father of Bhoorisravas and Sala. He came to Sini and challenged him to a fight. Sini gained the upper hand and, in his great joy, he caught Somadatta by the hair and placed his foot on his chest. This was a great insult to Somadatta, he being a son of the Kuru House. He prayed to God and obtained a boon that his son would do the same thing to one of the descendants of Sini. Now,

Bhoorisravas was the son of Somadatta, and Satyaki was the grandson of Sini. This was the ancient feud they were talking about. Incidentally, Krishna was the grandson of Soora: he was the son of Vasudeva. Arjuna was a grandson also, of Soora, since Kunti was the daughter of Soora.

The fight began. Bhoorisravas was a famous warrior. He had been a great devotee too. He commanded the respect of everyone on either side. He advanced towards Satyaki. They both fought furiously. Each had killed the other's horses. The charioteers were the next to go. Both were now without chariots. They were on the ground engaged in a duel with swords. It was a terrible sight. Arjuna and Krishna were watching them. They knew that Satyaki was just worn out by the day's work. His energy was at its lowest ebb. Still he fought on. Krishna said: "My body is burning at the sight of Satyaki. He came all this distance for your sake. He had to undergo so many hardships. He has lost all the energy he had. Bhoorisravas is slowly and steadily gaining the upper hand. This is an unfair fight. They are not equally matched". Even as he was saying it, Bhoorisravas had hit a powerful blow at Satyaki. It made him fall on the ground with his senses reeling. He had lost his consciousness. Bhoorisravas advanced towards the fallen hero and, taking Satyaki's hair in his left hand, he placed his foot on his chest. There was terrible shouting in the ranks when they saw this outrage on a fallen opponent.

Krishna saw this. He said: "Arjuna, it is dreadful to see Satyaki in the hands of this man. Satyaki is tired. He is on the ground with his senses out of his control. Bhoorisravas is doing a wrong thing in insulting him like this. It is time you interfere and do something to prevent this insult to your friend". Arjuna said: "He is just dragging him by the hair. He is not trying to kill him. Bhoorisravas is a fair fighter. He had to do this because of their enmity. Now he has done what he had sworn to do. He will leave Satyaki. He will not kill him". Just then they could see Bhoorisravas take the sword in his right hand, and they saw that he was trying to cut the head of Satyaki who was unconscious. Arjuna said: "I am harassed by everyone on all sides. I will protect Satyaki from Bhoorisravas. My mind does not like to interfere in a duel fought between others. I have to protect Satyaki who has done so much for me. I do not know what I have to do now". Krishna turned a horrified look at Bhoorisravas and the act which he was about to perform. He said: "Poor Satyaki is certain to be killed today, now, at this very moment, by Bhoorisravas who is bent on avenging the wrong done to his father by the grandfather of Satyaki. I am not pleased with his action. Harassing a tired man who has fainted and killing him then is not fair fighting". Arjuna

realized that he had to interfere. Bhoorisravas was holding the hair of Satyaki in his left hand and his right hand, which held the sword, was held aloft. With its descent Satyaki's life would have been ended.

Arjuna took a sharp arrow and shot it at Bhoorisravas. He cut off the right hand of Bhoorisravas. It fell on the ground. Bhoorisravas was furious with Arjuna. He said: "Arjuna, you have today done a shameful thing. It is not right. You have attacked a man who was not prepared for your attack. How can you face Yudhishthira today? He is a righteous man. I am sure he will not approve of what you have done. Born in the noble House of the Kurus, you have today done something that will bring disgrace to all of you. I am sure that you, by yourself, are not capable of so much meanness. I am sure that it is that charioteer of yours who has given you this advice. Only a son of the House of the Vrishnis will stoop to this". Arjuna became very angry. He said: "Please do not speak ill of Krishna. He is my lord and master. As for this interference of mine, I tried for a long time not to come between you and Satyaki even after knowing that the fight was not fair. But you were trying to kill my friend. He has done so much for me. He was about to be killed when he was not in a position to defend himself. Do you think that I am such a heartless man as to sit and watch my friend being killed without lifting up a little finger for him? All these days, in the war, several duels have been fought. The moment one became weak others have rushed to his help. It is but right that one should think of others too, and how can I watch my friend, my dependent, my disciple, my dear Satyaki being killed by you when he has not the strength to defend himself? I believe that all who fight for me have a right to be defended by me. It has been my rule. If I had just looked on and allowed the killing of Satyaki, sin would have clung to me. But not now. You attacked Satyaki knowing that he was not in a fit condition to fight. I could have cut your head off for this act of yours. You talk to me of Dharma. You, who stood by and watched while my Abhimanyu, chariotless, weaponless, without his bow, without any defence, was killed cruelly by all the great Kaurava heroes. Where did your righteousness go then? Did you say that it was unfair? No! Did you talk to your worthless nephews that they were doing something that was against the dharma of a kshatriya? No! You stood by and watched while that child was being murdered. I suppose you expect such a behaviour from me: that I would stand by and watch my friend being killed by unfair means. I do not think that I was wrong in interfering. It has been my rule, which I have tried to follow, that I would always take care of all those who fight for me. I had to protect Satyaki if I have to be true to my principle".

No one spoke a word. Arjuna was overcome with pity for Bhoorisravas. He said: "My lord, I am sorry I have been born a kshatriya. I had to do this to you, one of the noblest of the sons of the Kuru House. I do not curse myself for this condition of yours. I curse Duryodhana for the sin of making you reach this end." Bhoorisravas listened to it all and bent his head down to the ground. He lifted up his other hand and acknowledged the words of Arjuna. He had no more wish to live. He spread kusa grass on the ground and sat on it prepared to abandon his body by yoga.

The army was breathlessly watching the immense drama that was being enacted. The great Bhoorisravas had renounced the world and had decided to die. When all eyes were turned in his direction, Satyaki woke up from his faint. He jumped up. He caught up his sword in his hand and rushed towards Bhoorisravas with the intention of killing him. There was great consternation at the sight of this. Arjuna and Krishna turned horrified eyes in his direction. They tried to stop him. But he did not heed them. He rushed towards the form of Bhoorisravas and cut off his head. Bhoorisravas had turned his mind away from the war, and he was killed by Satyaki. He was defenceless. He had lost one arm and he was sitting with his mind fixed on the other world. And in that state, he was killed by Satyaki, the greatest of the heroes on the side of the Pandavas. It was an unfortunate incident in the life of Satyaki: a life that was otherwise blameless.

Chapter 23

THE DEATH OF JAYADRATHA

Arjuna was very angry with Satyaki. But he did not say a word. Satyaki turned on all of them with a defiant look. He said: "All of you think that I have done a wrong thing. I do not think so. You all shout: 'It is not fair. He must not have been killed when he was defenceless'. I see that it is easy to teach Dharma to others. Yesterday, when that child said, 'Come one by one, I will fight with you,' you never listened to him. Your righteousness had gone into eclipse then, perhaps. When Radheya cut his bow from behind him, where was your righteousness? The great commander of the Kaurava army was the man who trapped Abhimanyu into that vyuha and he was the man who taught all of you the method of killing Abhimanyu. You never thought of righteousness then. Not one of you has any right to

talk about dharma. As for my killing Bhoorisravas, it may look as though I have done something wrong. I do not think I did. I have taken an oath too that I would kill the man who insults me. This man insulted me by placing his foot on my chest. Arjuna, in his affection for me, and with a desire to do what he has always sworn to do, cut off the hand of Bhoorisravas and robbed me of my glory. I have done just what I had sworn to do. Bhoorisravas insulted me and he tried to kill me when I was unconscious. That does not seem like Adharma to you. But my action looks wrong. I have done nothing wrong in killing a man who insulted me". The devas who had assembled in the sky to watch the course of the dreadful war spoke: "There is no blame attached to Satyaki in this. It has been ordained that this had to be the way of it. No one should blame Satyaki. The gods have said that Bhoorisravas is to be killed only by Satyaki. What he did is not wrong". No one spoke after that. In his heart of hearts Arjuna did not approve of the action of Satyaki. But it was no use trying to say anything about it. Bhoorisravas had been killed and there the matter ended. He had to think of something more important: the killing of Jayadratha.

Arjuna said: "Krishna, it is getting late. We must hurry. Let us go near our victim. We have to hurry up". Krishna went fast towards the spot where Jayadratha was stationed in the midst of all the heroes of the Kaurava army. The others on the side of the Kauravas hurried to the spot. Duryodhana, Radheya, Vrishasena, Aswatthama, Kripa, all of them were there. They wanted to stop the progress of Arjuna and prevent him from meeting Jayadratha in a duel. Arjuna was now exactly in front of Jayadratha. He could see him. Arjuna looked at Jayadratha, his eyes crimson with wrath. Radheya came to Satyaki to engage him in a duel so that he might not be near Arjuna. Arjuna said: "Krishna, look at the courage of Radheya. He has just seen Bhoorisravas killed and yet he thinks he can fight with Satyaki. I do not want Radheya to be killed by Satyaki. I want to kill him myself. Take me to Radheya". Krishna did not want a duel between Arjuna and Radheya. He was afraid of the Sakti which had been given to Radheya by Indra. So he said: "It is no matter, Arjuna. Let him fight with Satyaki. I will think of taking you to Radheya later. Actually we have no time for that now. The sun will set in no time. Think of all those men around Jayadratha. You have to cross all of them before you can get at Jayadratha. Let us not worry about Radheya now".

Satyaki was without a chariot and without any weapon except the sword with which he had killed Bhoorisravas. The chariot of Arjuna was about to proceed further. Krishna blew the Rishabha note

on his Panchajanya. In no time the chariot of Krishna with its eagle banner came into sight. Satyaki smiled his thanks and got into the chariot to fight with Radheya. The fight was wonderful. The skill of Daruka in driving the chariot won the admiration of everyone there: even that of Krishna. The warriors on the side of the Kauravas had to come to the assistance of Radheya. They all surrounded Satyaki. Radheya had lost his chariot and he ascended that of Duryodhana. Dussasana and the rest of them were all defeated by Satyaki. They were at his mercy. But once again Satyaki remembered the oath of Bheema and allowed them to escape with their lives. The opinion on the battle-field that day was that only one could equal Krishna and Arjuna, and that was the great Satyaki. There was no fourth. This was said by Aswatthama and Kritavarma and others. Arjuna went to the presence of Radheya and said: "You killed my son when I was not there. Very soon, under your very eyes, I am going to kill your son Vrishasena. Let me see if you will be able to save him".

The sun's rays had lost their intensity. He was almost setting. Duryodhana spoke frantically to Radheya: "The sun has almost set. If you accost Arjuna now he will not be able to keep his oath. We must save Jayadratha. You are the one person who can do it". Even as they were conferring, Arjuna had advanced further into the vyuha. There was no time for any duel. All the Kauravas defended Jayadratha. Duryodhana, Radheya, Vrishasena, Salya, Aswatthama were the heroes who assaulted Arjuna. Jayadratha had to join them now. The sun had begun to take on a reddish hue. Arjuna fought as he had never fought before. It was a very hard task for him to fight with all of them together. Arjuna was using his astras. The fight was general. Bheema with Satyaki was helping Arjuna, and the three of them were fighting the immense army and the heroes on the other side. With the help of his astras, Arjuna was able to come very near Jayadratha after destroying the army which surrounded him. He began to harass Jayadratha now. Now that his death was so near, Jayadratha fought very bravely. It was not easy for Arjuna to defeat him easily. He was a great fighter and he was fighting for time. If only they could prevent Arjuna for a few moments from coming near enough to kill Jayadratha, there would be no more need to fight any more. The sun would set and Arjuna would fall into the fire and kill himself as he said he would. With the death of Arjuna, the end of the Pandavas was imminent. This was the thought that was present in the minds of all of them as they fought with Arjuna.

Krishna realised that it would not be possible for Arjuna to kill Jayadratha before sunset. He spoke to Arjuna: "Arjuna, I am afraid it will not be possible for you to kill Jayadratha before sunset. It is

terrible but the fact is the sun will set in a few moments. I will have to use my yoga and do something. Arjuna, do not worry. Listen to me and obey me implicitly. When I say 'Shoot' you must shoot your great astra at Jayadratha". Krishna thought of his chakra. He made it cover the disc of the sun. Darkness descended suddenly on them like a curtain. Arjuna was unhappy. But there was great excitement in the Kaurava camp. All of them lifted up their eyes and they were looking at the sun which had set so suddenly to save the life of Jayadratha. With a smile of triumph mingled with happiness and relief, Jayadratha raised his head to look at the sun which could not be seen. Krishna said: "Arjuna, Look! Jayadratha has lifted up his head to look at the sky. He is off his guard. Shoot!" Arjuna took up his precious astra, the Pasupata which he had been worshipping all these years, and he shot this at Jayadratha. It cut his neck and severed his head from his body. Before it could fall on the ground, Krishna said: "Arjuna, make your astra take the head to the father of Jayadratha and place it on his lap—I will tell you the reason later". Arjuna did as he was told. The Kaurava army saw the head of Jayadratha being borne in the sky by the arrow. The head was placed on the lap of the father of the dead man, who was performing his evening prayers near Samantapanchaka. When his prayers were over, he got up. The head of Jayadratha rolled on the groud. The head of the father of Jayadratha split into a thousand fragments.

The moment Jayadratha died, the darkness lifted and the sun shone in all his glory for a few moments as though he wanted to prove to all that he had not set. The sun then disappeared beyond the western hill. The Kauravas were sunk in gloom. They were so sure that they could avert the tragedy, and they could not.

Chapter 24

DRONA TOUCHED TO THE QUICK

Arjuna recited the incantation for the withdrawal of the great Pasupata. As soon as it was withdrawn, a cool breeze blew on the field. It bore the perfume of a thousand flowers with it. Krishna got out of his chariot and embraced Arjuna. He was so relieved at the thought that Arjuna's life had been saved. The Kaurava heroes had all left the place. They had not been able to save Jayadratha. He had

been killed even as they were all looking on. Duryodhana wept tears of humiliation.

Bheema set up such a shout that the four quarters resounded in echo. Yudhishthira knew that Jayadratha had been killed. He heard the Devadatta and Panchajanya making music. Arjuna fell at the feet of Krishna and said: "Lord, this is all your doing. Without you, no one can do anything. You helped me cross this great ocean and made me fulfil my promise to my child. With your grace, Yudhishthira will rule the world after the death of all these sinners. You are our guide in the path of Truth". Krishna smiled a pleased smile at the words of Arjuna. He showed the field to Arjuna and said: "Today Satyaki and you have destroyed SEVEN Akshauhinis of their army. In fact Satyaki has caused more havoc than even you. Look at the field".

They hurried to the presence of Yudhishthira. On the way, Krishna told Arjuna why the head of Jayadratha had to be dropped on the lap of his father. He said: "Brihatkshatra, the father of Jayadratha, got this son after performing a great penance. He obtained the boon that his son could not be killed by ordinary men and by ordinary methods. He would be killed only by the greatest of heroes and by the greatest of all weapons. The boon was granted. Not satisfied with that, the father wanted another boon. He wanted the head of the man who made the head of Jayadratha fall on the ground, to split into a thousand fragments. That boon was also granted. That was why I wanted you to take the head of Jayadratha to his father, so that he may be the one to drop it on the ground".

They reached the presence of Yudhishthira. Yudhishthira jumped down from his chariot and hurried to embrace Arjuna. His eyes were raining tears. "Thank god for this", said Yudhishthira. "Arjuna, you are alive. Krishna, I am happy to see you alive". He embraced Satyaki and Bheema. He was delirious with joy. He said: "Krishna, you are the one person who has made this possible. I am sure nothing else is responsible for the success of Arjuna except your grace. Arjuna was able to keep his oath, because you had decided that he should not fail". His voice was choked with tears. Krishna said: "No, Yudhishthira, you are wrong. Jayadratha was killed because of the fire of anger which blazed in your eyes yesterday. A good man's anger is more powerful than anything else on this earth. Your anger was the cause of the success of Arjuna in this inhuman task he had undertaken".

For the first time in his life, Duryodhana realised that the words of Bheeshma were true and that it was not possible to defy Arjuna. Duryodhana was alone in his tent, thinking of the events of the day and the many days that had gone by. He realised that no one could

equal Arjuna. Not Drona, nor Kripa, nor Aswatthama, nor even Radheya. No one could be called the equal of Arjuna. He had crossed the army without any one to help him, and he had destroyed the army. He had killed Jayadratha while they were all watching, and no one could stop him. Depending on all these people, Duryodhana had treated the words of Krishna as foolish. He had warned him of all this when he was in Hastinapura. His uncle Vidura had been warning him again and again of the power of Arjuna. But he had not listened to him. Duryodhana was speechless with woe. He went to Drona and spoke to him. He wanted someone to comfort him. Radheya was just as unhappy as he was.

Duryodhana was in the tent of the acharya. He was in tears. He said: "Look, my lord, at the ruin wrought in our army by that single warrior Arjuna. Look at the number of kings who have lost their lives for my sake. I made our grandfather Bheeshma, the first commander. He cannot die. Such a man has been made to fall by Arjuna. Today Arjuna and Satyaki have destroyed seven Akshauhinis. So many kings came to my help. They fought so that I may become lord of the world. And now they have all reached the abode of death. They have lost their lives for me, and I am alive. I am like a coward who cannot fight. I have lived to see the death of my dear friends. They have suffered for my sins. I know that a hundred Asvamedhas will not wash off this sin of mine. I have failed my friend. I had promised to Jayadratha that not a hair of his head would be touched. When I think of Jalasandha, that great hero, my heart is ready to break. Sudakshina is dead. Srutayus and Achutayus and Srutayudha who was invincible are all dead. Vinda and Anuvinda, those valiant brothers are gone. Alambusa is gone. I am the cause of the death of all of them. I have nothing left to live for. I will avenge the death of all these friends of mine. I will kill all the Pandavas and the Panchalas and satisfy the souls of the dead. I will kill them or I will die and join my friends who have reached heaven. I have to avenge the death of Jayadratha and Bhoorisravas. I will go now".

Drona was sorry for the king who was so unhappy. He could not bear to see the tears in the eyes of Duryodhana. He said: "My dear Duryodhana, it is well known that Arjuna is invincible. We are trying not to face the truth. It is not possible for anyone to face Arjuna. Let us not think of the past. We can do nothing about it. I will try my best to please you. I promise you that I will not remove this armour of mine until all your enemies are killed. Either that, or I will die. I will fight till there is no breath in my body. My son Aswatthama will also fight with me. I will not allow these people to

sleep tonight. We will have a fight during the night also. I will fight to the best of my ability". Drona set out for the battle-field.

Duryodhana and Radheya set out together for the field. On the way Duryodhana said: "Look how the vyuha was broken by Arjuna and how Jayadratha was killed. We were all guarding him and yet he was killed. My army has been destroyed. More than half has been destroyed in one day by Arjuna and Satyaki. I am sure the acharya allowed Arjuna into the vyuha because Arjuna is his favourite pupil. Or else, Radheya, how could this have happened? How could Arjuna get past Drona if he had not been allowed to do so? Drona had given assurance to Jayadratha that he would protect him, and he let him down by allowing Arjuna into the vyuha. If I had known this, I would have allowed Jayadratha to go back to his kingdom last night. He was so frightened and this man assured him that he would not be killed. And he has allowed Arjuna to kill him. Look at this army. Every dead man bears arrows marked with Arjuna's name. So many of my brothers have been killed today. I am very angry with Drona".

Radheya was not pleased with the words of Duryodhana. He said: "You must not talk like that about our acharya. He is fighting as well as he can. He has tried his best. At his age, it is wonderful that he is doing so much for you. You must be grateful to him for that. That Arjuna cannot be defeated by Drona. Arjuna, with his chariot drawn by the white horses, with Krishna as his charioteer, has managed to elude the acharya. I do not think it is fair on your part to blame Drona for that. We all fought as well as we could. But still it was not possible to protect Jayadratha. I can only say that fate is more powerful than all the valour of man. Duryodhana, we try our level best to do something. But if fate has decided to do the opposite, there is no use in blaming it on each other. Fate watches our actions. But in the end it all ends as fate wants it to. Everything we have done so far has been frustrated by fate. We can only try our best. The result is in the hands of fate. It is no use trying to defy fate. We can only hope for the best. Come, my friend, cast off this depression and fight. We will fight. Whether we win or lose is not ours to decide". They had reached the boundary of the army. The Pandava army was ready to fight.

The fight was on. It was a dreadful sight. There was no sun to light up the battle-field. The two armies met in the dark.

Drona fought as one inspired. Drona, Kripa, Radheya and Duryodhana attacked the army of the Pandavas with such fury that it was not possible for them to escape death. The arrows poured out of the bow of Duryodhana in an unending stream. Bheema came to the

rescue of his army. The others were also at the front defending the army. A duel was fought between Duryodhana and Yudhishthira. It looked as though each was bent on fighting till the end of time. Drona interfered and made the fight general. The darkness was a great hindrance to both the sides. In the light of the stars they could see nothing. The arrows were sent just anyhow. No sure aim could be taken. It looked like blind armies fighting with each other. The javelins and saktis which were being hurled were looking like streaks of lightning illuminating the dark sky. Drona was trying his best to kill as many of them as he could. He wanted to be the sole destroyer of the army. Bheema was doing his share in the general slaughter. Some of the sons of Dhritarashtra came into his grasp. They were literally crushed by him.

Somadatta met Satyaki in single fight. He was very angry with Satyaki for having killed his son Bhoorisravas. The fight became dangerously intense. The old man had lost Sala already. He had now lost two sons in a single day. It was a terrible fight, and of course Satyaki was the more powerful of the two. Duryodhana had to go to the help of the old man. Dhrishtadyumna came to help Satyaki. Somadatta fainted and he was borne away from the field. Aswatthama came to challenge Satyaki. Ghatotkacha also came to meet Aswatthama. One look at the son of Bheema was enough to make the Kaurava army tremble with fear. His war-cry at the sight of the army sent a shiver through the enemy ranks. Ghatotkacha had brought his team of rakshasas with him. Night had come and their strength had increased.

Ghatotkacha had begun to use his maya tactics. Aswatthama was one of the few who did not care for this stunt of Ghatotkacha. He used his astras to dispel the maya. This made it worse. Ghatotkacha began to fight furiously with Aswatthama. There was a wonderful duel fought between these two. Ghatotkacha's skill with the bow and arrow had not been seen by anyone so far. Aswatthama now hurled a chakra in the direction of Ghatotkacha with the intention of killing him. Ghatotkacha evaded it very nimbly. He rose up in the sky and tried his maya tactics once again. But it was all just futile in front of Aswatthama. He had to descend and fight normally once again. The king was there. He was discouraged on looking at the team of rakshasas. Aswatthama comforted him and said: "Please do not worry, my friend. I will be able to tackle all their tactics and their master too. You leave it all to me". Duryodhana returned to a spot where Sakuni was stationed. He sent Sakuni to fight with the Pandavas. Sakuni agreed and hurried to the front.

CHAPTER 25

RADHEYA AND KRIPA

This was the first time the Pandavas saw Aswatthama in a fury. He looked like Sankara when he was burning up the host of the asuras. No one could stand up against his arrows. No one, except Bheema's son. Ghatotkacha and the Panchala princes fought very well. But Aswatthama killed most of the Panchala princes. Ghatotkacha was hurt. He fainted away and was carried out of the field. The rakshasa army of Ghatotkacha suffered at the hands of Aswatthama. The fight became more intense now. Seeing so many of his sons dead, Drupada fought valiantly. A duel was fought between Bheema and Baahlika. Baahlika was the father of Somadatta. No one was able to think of him as an old man when they saw him on the battle-field. He was so active. But Bheema was able to kill him by throwing a powerful mace at him. There was great consternation at the fall of this ancient Kuru veteran. He was actually the oldest man alive in that group. Even Bheeshma was younger. The sons of Dhritarashtra came to fight with Bheema, and he killed some ten of them. Sakuni had arrived with his army. Some of his brothers were killed by Bheema. Yudhishthira was destroying the enemy army. Drona came to the rescue of his army. Drona tried all the astras he had in his possession to harass Yudhishthira. But they were all counteracted by Yudhishthira. The astras presided over by Varuna, Yama, Agni, Twashtar, Savita, were all frustrated. Even Indra's astra was futile. In great anger Drona tried to send the Brahmastra against Yudhishthira. He sent it and it was warded off by the same astra by Yudhishthira. Everyone was watching the duel. Cries of joy could be heard from the side of the Pandavas when they saw the fine display of Yudhishthira. Drona had to abandon the fight with Yudhishthira and turn his attention to the rest of the army.

The army was not able to stand the sight of this man who had become so very cruel. Arjuna and Bheema came to the front and began to fight with Drona. They were attacking him on both sides. The army of the Kuru king began to melt now. The brothers were just raining arrows on the army manned by Drona. It looked as though it would all be gone in a matter of moments. Duryodhana said: "Radheya, you are my only hope. You must stop this river of death from overflowing. I am unhappy at the way things are shaping". Radheya said: "I will go and fight with them. Not even Indra can save them from me. Please cast off this worry. I will go and kill that Arjuna and make

you happy. If Arjuna is killed, their power will be gone. I have my Sakti with me. I will use it on him and he will be killed by his own father. I will go now and challenge the great Arjuna. You can see me. I will rout their army and I will defeat the Pandavas. I will kill Arjuna". Kripa was there listening to the talk between the two. He smiled disparagingly at Radheya and said: "Excellent! Excellent! Your words indeed are wonderful. If it were possible to achieve everything with just words, then the Kaurava monarch has found the perfect man to steer him over these hard days! Radheya, you talk too much. You speak brave words in Duryodhana's presence but I am yet to see the action that is meant to follow these words. You will certainly be defeated by the Pandavas once you meet them in battle. I have seen you in action. Hardly a few months ago you gave us the pleasure of watching you when you fought with Arjuna on the outskirts of the city of Virata. Why do you talk so much? You could not meet just one man, Arjuna, and now you are saying that you will meet all the Pandavas who are led by Krishna. If you are really a man of action, you must act without talking so much about it. Be silent and let your hands speak for you. You are like the autumn cloud. It roars so much but it does not give a drop of water. I know you will talk about how brave you are, as long as you do not meet Arjuna. Once you meet him, we can see that your talk is all just talk. They say that a kshatriya is good at action: that a brahmin is good at speeches: I know that Arjuna is good at archery. As for Radheya, he is good at building castles in the air".

Radheya was furious with Kripa. He said: "Roar? Of course I will roar. All heroes roar when there is a prospect of a fight ahead. I do not see anything wrong in roaring. But your remarks, my lord, are insulting. I am not just a talker. I am sure of fighting well with the Pandavas. I know that Krishna is on their side. I will try to defeat them all to please my king. I will win the world and lay it at the feet of my king who is the only friend I have". Kripa said: "I say it again that you are just building castles in the air. I know that victory is theirs, since Krishna is on their side. Arjuna is invincible. The Pandavas cannot be defeated since they have always been righteous. Yudhishthira is the image of Dharma. Arjuna is a great hero. He is not an easy opponent. It is just a matter of days now, before Yudhishthira becomes lord of the earth. This is just bravado on your part. You will not be able to meet Arjuna. Why then should I talk of your defeating him?"

Radheya said: "I agree with you when you say that the Pandavas are righteous: that Yudhishthira is the image of Dharma: that Arjuna is a great hero: that he is not an easy opponent. I grant all that. But

I can defeat him. I have the Sakti which was given to me by Indra. It cannot fail. You dare not speak disparagingly of that too! If Arjuna is killed, there will not be strength enough in the other brothers to defy us. I know that I can give this world to my king in today's fight. But you are partial to the Pandavas. You are always talking well of them and ill of us. Another word like this from you, and you will make me so angry that I will lose all control. I will cut your tongue out with my sword. You will then not be able to talk in this strain. War is an uncertain thing. Victory is a difficult woman to woo. She has been favouring the Pandavas so far. Bheeshma has fallen. Several of the brothers of the king are gone. Heroes like Bhagadatta, heroes who were considered invincible, are all gone. I can only say that fate is against us, when I see so many of our heroes killed by the Pandavas. I do not believe that the Pandavas are more powerful. No. Fate is responsible for their success so far. Fate is the most powerful. I will fight with them as well as I can, and the rest is in the hands of fate. I believe that fate is superior to me, and not Arjuna".

Radheya rushed at Kripa with his sword unsheathed. This was resented by Aswatthama. He rushed up to Radheya and said: "I will kill you for the way you are talking to my uncle." Duryodhana came to them and stopped Aswatthama. Radheya said: "Release him from your hold, my lord. He has always spoken like this to me. I will fight with him first". Kripa said: "Duryodhana, we have all been allowing this man to talk like this, since he is fond of you. Let Arjuna punish his arrogance. I am not going to think about it". Duryodhana said: "Aswatthama, please stop this. I beg of you. This is not the time for personal fights. I am depending on all of you to help me win the war. The army of the Pandavas is even now coming towards us. Please desist from this action of yours. I request you most humbly not to be angry with Radheya. He is very dear to me". The son of the acharya was able to control himself, since he was sorry for Duryodhana. Radheya took up his bow and went towards the enemy army.

Chapter 26

THE MIDNIGHT BATTLE

The Pandava army saw Radheya advancing towards them. They said: "Here is Radheya. His frown is terrible. He has always hated

the Pandavas. He has decided to kill them". Radheya rushed on the army with the intention of destroying it. He was terrible with his bow and arrows. The army suffered at his hands. His fury was like that of Indra when he fought with the asuras. The army was being harassed by him. Arjuna came up to defend his army. Looking at Arjuna who had come up to fight a duel with him, Radheya's eyes lit up in anticipation. It was a splendid spectacle, this duel between the two. In the dark night lit up by just the stars and the streaks like lightning made by the many arrows and javelins, the two fought, each bent on killing the other. Radheya was without his bow and chariot for a moment. Duryodhana was wild with Arjuna. He said: "I will fight with the Pandavas and kill all of them". He went to help his friend. Kripa rushed to his nephew Aswatthama and said: "Duryodhana has gone to fight with Arjuna. He thinks that he can destroy the Pandavas. You must hurry now and guard the king. Or else he will be killed in no time. In their anger against him, the Pandavas will burn him up, and it is essential that someone should go to his assistance".

Aswatthama hurried to the presence of the king. He said: "Duryodhana, when I am here, why should you fight? My king, as long as we are all alive, there is no reason why you should come to the front! I will fight with Arjuna. I ask you to go back and watch". Duryodhana said: "I am nervous. Your father, the great acharya, protects the Pandavas since they are his favourite disciples. You have also been quite indifferent all these days. I thought that you are also like your father. Your prowess has been dormant so far. I am sure you are like this either to please Yudhishthira or perhaps his queen Draupadi. It is my ill luck that all those who have affection for me have all either been defeated or killed. I depend on you to destroy the army of the Pandavas. Please go and attack them. Make it a matter of moments before they all reach the abode of Yama". Aswatthama said: "What you say is right. My father and myself are quite fond of the Pandavas. But we are just as fond of you too. We are able to keep our affections apart when we are fighting. Be assured of that. I am here. With Radheya, Salya, Kripa, Kritavarma and my father I will destroy the army of the Pandavas. You are of a very suspicious nature. That is why you distrust us. It is not right. I will fight to the last breath in my body. You will see my prowess today when I attack the Pandavas". He went out of the presence of Duryodhana to fight with the Pandavas.

Aswatthama fought with fury. There was no one who could stand up against the son of Drona. Dhrishtadyumna came to meet him. They hated each other. Aswatthama thought that he could avert the

death of his father by killing Dhrishtadyumna. Their duel with words was more intense than their duel with their arrows. Each was hurling insults at the other. Each was burning the other with his eyes and their fight was terrible. The army of the Panchalas had suffered a great loss because of Aswatthama. He defeated Dhrishtadyumna by making him lose his bow and his chariot. There was loud cheering from the Kaurava host at the sight of this. The fight had become general once again. The king was bent on fighting with Yudhishthira. He was challenged by Bheema. The Pandava brothers on the one side and Drona, Duryodhana and the rest of them on the other side were engaged in fighting a desperate battle. Somadatta met Satyaki again. It was a wonderful duel. They fought for a long time. Finally Satyaki killed Somadatta by sending a very sharp and strong arrow. Yudhishthira joined Satyaki in his fight. Drona came there. There was general slaughter on either side. Yudhishthira made Drona faint. Drona got up and sent the Vayavyastra. Yudhishthira counteracted it by sending the same astra. Krishna hurried to Yudhishthira and said: "Drona is bent on capturing you. Why do you go to him often? There is a man who has been born to kill him and that is Dhrishtadyumna. Leave Drona to him. Bheema is fighting with the Kaurava monarch. Go there and join him. It is but right that a king should fight with a king". Yudhishthira agreed to it and went to the spot where Bheema was fighting with Duryodhana.

The darkness was impenetrable. The soldiers began to destroy each other thinking that they were all enemies. Drona and the king conferred and decided that the soldiers should hold torches, abandoning their weapons. They were all only too happy to do so. The field was suddenly lit up by millions of torches held in the hands of ordinary soldiers. The same thing was done by the Pandava army too. The fight was now to become a series of duels between the several heroes. Duryodhana commanded his heroes to guard their commander. He said: "There is no one on the side of the Pandavas capable of hurting our acharya except Dhrishtadyumna. You must all prevent the two from meeting". There were a number of duels fought between the several heroes. It was a magnificent sight to see just the duels without the army to distract the attention. The field looked as bright as day with the many torches that were illuminating it. Satyaki killed a king called Bhoori. Ghatotkacha was defeated by Aswatthama. Bheema was able to defeat Duryodhana.

Radheya met Sahadeva in a duel. Sahadeva fought wonderfully. But Radheya, in a few moments, had killed his horses and cut his bow. Sahadeva took up the sword in his hand. That was also cut by the great Radheya with a taunting smile lodged permanently on

his lips. A mace was flung at Radheya by Sahadeva. That was also stopped by Radheya. Sahadeva jumped down from the chariot and caught up the wheel of his chariot and was ready to throw it at Radheya. With a single arrow Radheya was able to arrest its progress. Poor Sahadeva was absolutely helpless and at the mercy of Radheya. With a smile which was more a sneer, Radheya came near Sahadeva and said: "My dear child, do not attempt the impossible. Go and look for your equal and fight with him. It is not good for you to fight with your superiors". Radheya could not kill his brother who was at his mercy. He touched Sahadeva with the tip of his bow even as he had done to Bheema and thus insulted Sahadeva. Radheya said: "Your brother Arjuna is fighting there at the front. He is a great hero. You can go and join him or you can go home". Radheya went away from the presence of Sahadeva. Amazed at the thought that Radheya did not kill him when he could have, Sahadeva proceeded towards the army of the Panchalas. Virata was defeated by Salya, and Arjuna was able to defeat a king called Ala. Nakula was able to defeat Sakuni, and Kripa vanquished Sikhandi.

Drona and Dhrishtadyumna met in a fierce duel. It would have continued longer. But remembering the instructions of Duryodhana, several of the heroes came to the defence of Drona. Dhrishtadyumna too was joined by the warriors on his side. The fight became general. Radheya was the star actor for the moment. There was nothing that could stop him and his arrows. Everyone suffered. Satyaki and Radheya fought a glorious duel. Wherever the handsome Satyaki went, all eyes were turned on him. Radheya and Satyaki were both familiar with all the astras, and the fight was interesting to watch. Their duel was not to be continued. There was help which came to both of them, and the fight became general. Radheya heard the twang of the Gandiva. He went to Duryodhana and said: "Arjuna has begun to destroy the army. This continuous music can mean only that. I can hear the panic in our army because of his progress. Satyaki is with me. I will try to kill him. It will be quite easy. Please send some portion of the army to accost Arjuna. We will try to kill Satyaki and Dhrishtadyumna. Then nothing can stop victory from approaching you with open arms". Duryodhana and Sakuni went to attack Arjuna. Radheya went back to fight with Satyaki. The Pandavas had come to the help of Satyaki. The battle raged like a terrible storm. It had never been so fierce as it was that night. The prowess of Arjuna on one side, and Radheya, Drona and Aswatthama on the other, was something that struck terror into the hearts of both the armies. Radheya managed to defeat Dhrishtadyumna. Arjuna and Bheema put new life into their army and advanced towards Radheya. Krishna was asking Arjuna to do his best

to bring courage into the hearts of the soldiers. He saw Drona fighting with extreme vigour. Radheya was looking as though no one could stop him. He was working havoc. Everyone said: "It is not possible to face Radheya. He is like the God of Death. We cannot face him". So saying, they ran away from the field. If a blade of grass moved in the breeze, they thought it was Radheya pursuing them. He had caused such a panic in the army of the Pandavas. Yudhishthira was terrified by this slaughter by Radheya. Arjuna said: "Krishna, Radheya is terrible today. Yudhishthira is frightened of the prowess of Radheya, and he has no hopes of the army surviving the night. I have to go to Radheya. I have to fight him now. Our army is suffering from the shafts of this man. Take me to him at once. I have to kill him". Krishna was not for it. He knew about the Sakti which Radheya had with him. In his fury Radheya was sure to aim it at Arjuna. That would kill Arjuna. There was no doubt about it. Krishna said: "Arjuna, there are two people who can fight Radheya. One is of course you, and the other is Ghatotkacha. He can easily defeat Radheya. You can, in the meantime, fight with Drona and the others, and prevent the capture of Yudhishthira".

Unwillingly, Arjuna agreed to the suggestion of Krishna. He had wanted to fight with Radheya. But Krishna's warning about the safety of Yudhishthira was something to think about. He did not want any calamity to happen. It was also a fact that Ghatotkacha was good enough to fight with Radheya. Arjuna summoned Ghatotkacha. Krishna smiled at him and said: "We are all depending on you, Ghatotkacha, to help us now. Look at this army of ours. It is being destroyed by Radheya. There is no one to oppose him except you. You are good at using maya tactics. Try and destroy the army of the Kauravas. Fight with Radheya with your divine astras and kill him. You will be doing a service to the Pandavas. I cannot bear to see the Pandavas being defeated by Radheya. Arjuna will be fighting with Drona and Aswatthama, aided by our commander Dhrishtadyumna. I want you to oppose Radheya". Listening to the words of Krishna, Ghatotkacha said: "I will at once go and prepare for the fight". Arjuna said: "My dear Ghatotkacha, you will have Satyaki with you. The two of you will certainly be able to work wonders". The great Ghatotkacha was very happy at the prospect of the fight ahead of him. He went to the presence of Radheya. Looking at him, the Kaurava army was terrified.

Chapter 27

GHATOTKACHA

The fight between Radheya and Ghatotkacha began in the middle of the dreadful night. Duryodhana saw the two ready to kill each other. He said: "Dussasana, Arjuna has sent the terrible Ghatotkacha to fight with my Radheya. You must go to help Radheya. Take a large portion of the army with you and help Radheya to withstand the rakshasa army of Ghatotkacha". Just at the time when he was talking to Dussasana, there came to the king the son of Jatasura. He said: "I want to fight on your side so that I can avenge the death of my father. He was killed by Bheema. I want to fight the Pandavas". His arrival was so opportune that Duryodhana was very happy. He said: "You are welcome to join us. Please go and fight with Ghatotkacha, the son of Bheema".

The son of Jatasura hurried to the spot where Ghatotkacha was standing, and began to fight with him. The fight was just as dreadful as that fought between Ghatotkacha and Alambusa, which took place in the morning. Both used maya tactics. The newcomer was a terror. He was destroying the Pandava army at an alarmingly fast rate. Both the armies were now at the mercy of the two rakshasas, and there was terror in the heart of everyone. The son of Jatasura was without his chariot and he invited Ghatotkacha for a hand-to-hand fight. It was again like the wrestling which they saw between Ghatotkacha and the great Alambusa. Ghatotkacha thought that the fight had lasted long enough. He decided to kill his opponent. He jumped into the sky and descended from there. He had a sword in his hand and he swooped on his opponent. He cut the head of the son of Jatasura with one stroke of his sword. He lifted the head in his hand and went to the chariot of Duryodhana. With a smile on his red lips Ghatotkacha placed the head in the chariot of the king and said: "They say that one should not visit a king without a gift. Here is the head of one who is related to you. If you wait a little longer, I will bring you the head of someone who is very dear to you: the head of Radheya". Ghatotkacha did not wait for a reply. He rushed back to the presence of Radheya and resumed his fighting.

He was a sight to inspire terror into everyone with his huge form and his angry eyes. Radheya was in excellent form. He was just amused by the maya tactics of the son of Bheema. All the astras which were sent by the one were baffled by the other. The fighting stopped

in many places on the field. Everyone was watching the encounter between these two. It was unique. Ghatotkacha was destroying the army with the help of his maya. They were dying in thousands, and there was the noise of their desperate wails and screams all over the field. Radheya was undaunted by the terrible warfare of Ghatotkacha. His maya was aggravating in the extreme, and it was not easy for Radheya to fight with one who was on the ground this moment and up in the sky the next moment. Radheya was covered by the arrows which were literally being showered on him from the sky. Radheya sent his divine astras to combat the maya of Ghatotkacha. Ghatotkacha would assume various forms and harass the entire army. They could do nothing about it. As soon as his maya was destroyed by Radheya, he would descend to the earth and fight normally. But within a few moments he would jump into the sky and begin it all over again.

There came to Duryodhana another rakshasa by name Alayudha. He had brought an immense army with him. He approached the king and said: "My name is Alayudha. Hidimba, Kirmeera, and Baka were all my relatives. Bheema killed all of them. I have heard about this war and I have come to you to let me fight on your side. I want to take my revenge on Bheema for all that he has done to us. He has taken Hidimbi who should have belonged to one of us. I want to kill Bheema and the son of Hidimbi. Please let me fight on your side". Duryodhana was only too pleased to have this rakshasa to fight for him. He asked him to accost Ghatotkacha at once and kill him first. He could then kill Bheema. This Alayudha went and challenged Ghatotkacha. The Kauravas were very pleased with the arrival of Alayudha. They all cheered him as he proceeded towards the spot where the fight was going on between Radheya and Ghatotkacha.

Radheya was far superior to Aswatthama, Kripa, Drona and Kritavarma. He was better than all of them put together. This was evident to everyone. On the day of the tournament, when he was displaying his skill, Yudhishthira recognized his worth. He knew that he was the best archer in the world. That was the only cloud in his mental horizon. He had always been dreading the greatness of Radheya. But Ghatotkacha was getting the better of him. He had now reduced the size of the Kaurava army. The panic in the army had to be seen to be believed. Duryodhana summoned Alayudha to his presence and said: "Look at this army of mine which is being harassed by the son of your enemy. The man who is fighting with him is Radheya, the greatest archer in the world. You must go to his help and kill Ghatotkacha and save the army."

Now there were two fighting against Ghatotkacha. Bheema thought

that someone had to interfere. He saw that his son would find it difficult to tackle two strong opponents. Bheema went and hurt the newcomer with his arrows. Seeing him, Alayudha left the son and came to the father. They fought a duel. The rakshasa attendants of Alayudha began to harass the army of the Pandavas. They were suffering to a larger extent than the Kaurava army, since the attacks were unexpected and they had been feeling secure ever since the killing of Alambusa in the morning. Krishna said: "Arjuna, you must go to the help of your brother. He is being harassed by this dreadful rakshasa. Our army is also suffering. We must kill this Alayudha". The entire Pandava host led by Arjuna went to Radheya and the other rakshasas to kill them if possible. Bheema was faring not too well in his duel with Alayudha. He had lost his chariot and they were engaged in a fight with the mace. It looked as though Bheema might lose in the fight. Krishna went to Ghatotkacha and asked him to go and help his father. Ghatotkacha left Radheya and went to the help of his father. The Pandava group was fighting with Radheya. After fighting for a while, Ghatotkacha killed Alayudha. He cut his head too and took it to the chariot of the king and placed it there. He just smiled and came back without saying anything. Duryodhana was horrified at the sight of the head of the dead Alayudha.

Ghatotkacha's war-cry again filled the sky. He began his maya tactics again. Again Radheya had to counteract them all. Radheya could make all his attempts futile. If the terrible Ghatotkacha rained stones on him, Radheya would send the Vayavyastra. If he sent arrows on him from the sky, Radheya would send the Aindrastra and dispel the cloud of arrows. But still, the army was caught in the grip of terror. The Kaurava soldiers were speechless with horror. They could not even stand there. There was a cry from everyone: "Radheya, have mercy on us. Kill this terrible rakshasa. We cannot stand on the field even for a moment. We are suffering as we have never suffered before. It is up to you to protect us. Arjuna and Bheema are killing us by hundreds, but Ghatotkacha has destroyed most of the army. You must kill Ghatotkacha with the Sakti you have. That is the one weapon which can kill this rakshasa who has killed so many". Radheya heard it all. He realised that it was the only way. Ghatotkacha had caused too much havoc in the Kaurava army. Try as he might, he could do nothing with him. Not one of the astras was able to kill him, and it was imperative that he should be killed within the next few moments. It had to be done.

Chapter 28

THE DEATH OF GHATOTKACHA

Radheya knew that fate was against him. He had hopes of killing Arjuna, as long as he had the Sakti with him. But now, that Sakti had to be given up since the army had to be saved. With a great sigh like the last breath of a dying man, Radheya took up the Sakti in his hand. He remembered his getting it from Indra. Indra had said: "I will give my Sakti to you. You can use it on only one enemy. You can use it only once. It will certainly kill the person against whom it is aimed. But it cannot be repeated. It will at once return to me". Radheya had said: "I need it just against one person: just once. It can come back to you later on. I have just one enemy". Indra had said: "I know you mean Arjuna. But so long as Arjuna is protected by Krishna, no one can harm him: not even my Sakti. Krishna, the incarnation of the Lord, has taken it upon himself to protect the Pandavas. Your power will wane before him". Radheya had not paid any attention to the words of Indra. It all came back to Radheya as he took the Sakti in his right hand to use it against Ghatotkacha.

Yes, fate was indeed too powerful. He had no chance against it, absolutely none. All his dreams of killing Arjuna were gone. The Sakti was the only thing that would have helped him. And he had to use it on this Ghatotkacha, a rakshasa, to save the army of his friend. With a shrug of pain he pushed away the thoughts of tomorrow. He would die on the battle-field. He would be killed by his brother Arjuna. His mother's wishes would come true. She wanted Arjuna to live. So be it. Arjuna would live and Radheya would die. Krishna had sent Ghatotkacha to him just to make his Sakti futile. He could guess that. Radheya was now past all caring. He had to do his duty. He had to kill this rakshasa. He knew that the Pandavas could not be vanquished. He said to himself: "My dear friend, my beloved Duryodhana, you are ruined now, at this moment, when I kill Ghatotkacha with the Sakti. All your dreams of ruling this world will be just dreams. But I will be happy when I die. I will be really happy to be released from this human bondage. I am sick of life".

Radheya took the Sakti in his right hand. He looked at it for a moment. His tears blinded him. He hated to part with it. But he had to. Brushing his tears, Radheya hurled it at Ghatotkacha. There was a great commotion in the sky and on the earth as the Sakti sped like a streak of lightning. It pierced through the cloak of maya which

was covering up Ghatotkacha. The son of Bheema knew that he was to be killed. The Sakti entered the mighty chest of Ghatotkacha. Even at the moment when he realised that he had to die, Ghatotkacha had thoughts of helping the Pandavas. He used his maya for the last time. He made his body swell to immense proportions and, while falling, he fell on the Kaurava army and crushed one Akshauhini of it. The great Ghatotkacha was dead. He would no longer harass the army of the Kauravas.

The king was proud of the achievement of Radheya. He took him in his own chariot as a special mark of honour. There was nothing but joy in the hearts of the Kauravas when Ghatotkacha fell down killed by the Sakti of Radheya.

Bheema was stunned by the death of his son. He went to his brother Yudhishthira and wept tears of anguish. He never dreamed that his Ghatotkacha would die. Just a few moments ago he had come to help him fight with the powerful Alayudha. He was so much more powerful than Bheema himself. How could he die? Bheema was not able to stand up. He sat on the ground with his head in his two hands and wept bitter tears. His grief could not be assuaged. Yudhishthira was sunk in woe. Ghatotkacha was his favourite child, and he had to die because of this war. Yudhishthira did not know how he was to comfort Bheema. He took his hand in his and wiped his tears, his own flowing in rivulets all the while. So they sat trying to comfort each other.

Krishna, however, was wild with joy when he saw Ghatotkacha dead. He jumped up from his chariot and embraced Arjuna again and again. It was unusual behaviour on his part. Arjuna did not like it at all. He was grief-stricken at the death of Ghatotkacha, and this joy of Krishna was unbecoming. It was indecent. Arjuna said so. He said: "Krishna, just a moment has passed since Ghatotkacha was killed. We are all so unhappy about it. But you seem to be happy. It is not becoming at all. I cannot understand this untimely happiness of yours. You must tell me what makes you so happy".

Krishna said: "Arjuna, today is the happiest day in my life. The great Sakti, which Radheya had with him, has now gone back to Indra. I have nothing to fear from Radheya. I know now that Radheya is dead. If only you knew the sleepless nights I have spent in thinking of that Sakti, you will understand my joy. Do you think you would have been able to oppose Radheya when he had the Sakti in his possession? He is invincible. Everyone says that Arjuna is the greatest hero and that he is invincible. They are all wrong.

"When I had been to Hastinapura to talk to Duryodhana about

making it up with the Pandavas, he said: 'I have Radheya. Just that one person is enough to help me win the war'. Bheeshma and Drona were smiling at him as if to say that they did not credit Radheya with so much power. But *I knew* that Duryodhana was speaking the truth when he said that Radheya was enough to destroy the Pandavas. Duryodhana is very fond of Radheya. And love gives a third eye which sees what the others cannot see. Duryodhana *knew* instinctively that his Radheya is great. I know that Radheya is the greatest of all archers. You are not his equal at all. Bheeshma spoke at the beginning of the war. He said that, because he had lost his Kavacha and Kundalas and because of the two curses, Radheya was not as good as the other Maharathikas and Bheeshma classed him with Ardharathikas. But that old man was wrong. Radheya with his Sakti was more powerful than all the gods in the heavens. If Radheya had not lost his Kavacha and the Kundalas, or if he had his Sakti with him, no one, not Indra or Varuna or Kubera could have withstood him in battle. He was invincible. You with your Gandiva and I with my Chakra could not have done anything to Radheya. For your sake, Indra asked a boon of Radheya and took away his Kavacha and his Kundalas. But he had given him his Sakti. Now, without his Sakti, Radheya is like a serpent with its fangs removed: like fire which has begun to lose its fury. Radheya has lost his divinity and he can be tackled. But even now, there is no one good enough to kill him except you, Arjuna.

Radheya is a pious man. He has performed many good actions. He has honoured those who deserve honour. His self-mortification is something no human being can do. He is very compassionate. He will show compassion even to his enemies. He is the greatest of all archers. Bhargava himself has said that he is his equal. I know the greatness of Radheya, and Yudhishthira knows it. He knows that Radheya is the one man to be feared by the Pandavas. Radheya is like a lion in the midst of elephants: like the sun at midday. He cannot be seen because of his brilliance. You have never known or realised the greatness of Radheya. But I know. You can consider him to be as great as Yudhishthira, if not greater. The great Radheya has today become human because he has thrown away his Sakti. He can be killed by you in the war. I am so happy, because you have been rescued from the jaws of death. But come, let us go to the front. Drona is attacking our army. They are all so happy at the death of Ghatotkacha that they will fight as if they are intoxicated".

Satyaki asked Krishna why Radheya had not used the Sakti on Arjuna all these days. Krishna said: "Every night in the camp they would all discuss the war. Dussasana, Sakuni, and Duryodhana would ask him to kill Arjuna in the morning with the Sakti. Radheya would

agree. Every morning he would set out with the intention of challenging Arjuna for a single fight and killing him with the Sakti. But I was watchful, Satyaki. I would so manoeuvre the chariot that they would never meet: not long enough to fight a duel. I had also clouded the mind of Radheya so that he would forget his most powerful weapon. That is how I have been guarding my friend from Radheya's Sakti all these days".

Yudhishthira heard the noise of the attack of Drona. He spoke to Bheema: "Go, my child, and do your duty. There is brought to us the noise from the front. The commander of the Kaurava army is there. You have to go. I cannot. I am feeling faint because of the death of my dear child. I will not come to the front. Bheema, you must go". Bheema wiped away his tears and set out for the field.

Krishna guessed that Yudhishthira would be very unhappy. He went to him and found him in a faint. Yudhishthira woke up from his faint and spoke to Krishna, with great sorrow in his heart. He heard Krishna say: "Do not give way to sorrow, my lord. You must be brave. This weakness is not fitting to a king and warrior. You must get up and try to bear this grief". Yudhishthira said: "I know all that. I know the rules of war. I know that no life is certain on the battle-field. But my mind is grieving for my dear child. If I do not remember at least once, all that he did for us, will I not be the greatest sinner on this earth? Ghatotkacha has always been fond of me and I have loved him twice as much as I love Sahadeva. When we were in the Kamyaka forest he came to us. He kept us company when Arjuna was away performing penance. He was with us in the mountain Himavan. It was he who came to the rescue of Draupadi when she could not walk. He was the one who carried her all the way. Ever since the war began, he has been doing what was pleasing to us. Having lost him how can I be happy? How could he have died with so many of you looking on? Abhimanyu was killed when no one could go to his assistance. But Ghatotkacha was killed under your very eyes. I have a feeling that the killers of Abhimanyu were not punished. Jayadratha was killed with so much trouble by Arjuna. It would have been better if he had killed Drona or Radheya. They were more immediate causes for the death of Abhimanyu. Now, for the death of Ghatotkacha no one seems to think of punishing Radheya. I will go and fight with him and avenge the death of my dear child".

Yudhishthira rushed towards Radheya in a fury. Knowing that it was not a wise thing to do, Arjuna and Krishna followed him in their chariot. Vyaasa met Yudhishthira and spoke to him. He said: "Yudhishthira, do not be so unhappy at the death of Ghatotkacha. It has been ordained that he should die and so he had to die. Fortu-

nately for you, the Sakti which Radheya was keeping for the death of Arjuna has been used up by him. He cannot harm Arjuna any more. I can now tell you that five days from today you will be lord of this earth. Go back to your army". Vyaasa disappeared from the presence of Yudhishthira.

Chapter 29

DRONA HARASSED BY DURYODHANA

The fight began again. The two armies clashed and there was a great slaughter. The night had advanced far into the middle hour. All were overcome with sleep. The war had been raging since morning. This was the first time they fought after sunset. Sleep was the one thing they all longed for. No one thought of the war. They could only think of sleep. All the soldiers were just collapsing wherever they stood, overcome with the magic of sleep. Looking at them, Arjuna was overcome with pity for all of them. In the middle of the fight he suddenly raised his voice so that it could be heard by all, and said: "Everyone on the battle-field is tired. All of us are exhausted. The darkness is very thick. We can see nothing. If you, on the opposite side, are also willing, I wish to suggest that we rest on the battle-field for a while. Let us relax our limbs for a while. When the moon rises, we will resume the fighting". His suggestion was accepted, and it was wonderful for the soldiers to lie down and sleep: sleep where they could. Everywhere the field was strewn with sleeping soldiers. All of them, on either side, blessed Arjuna and said: "Arjuna is the only man who can think of others with compassion. God will reward him for his righteousness". The battle-field was silent now like a child which had cried itself to sleep in its mother's arms. Everyone was under the spell of sleep.

They might have slept for an hour or more. The moon rose up in the east. Red, like a newly opened lotus, the moon stood in the eastern sky scattering her beams on the dreadful battle-field. The moon, red when she rose, began to lose her redness and very slowly began to ascend in the heavens. She gleamed soft and white like the neck of a beautiful woman. The battle-field was lit up as though the sun had risen: so white was the light from the beautiful moon. They all woke up from sleep one by one. Suddenly there was the noise of all of them getting ready to fight once again. It was indeed an in-

human thing to have made the soldiers fight in the night. They were not quite awake and they had to fight once again. Drona had lost compassion for all human beings when he became the commander of the Kaurava army. This inhuman fighting was not done when Bheeshma was alive. But no one could complain. It was all in the day's work.

Just one fourth of the night was left. The battle began once again in the white light of the moon. Soon that light waned. The east was now a glowing furnace of copper red, and the sun rose in all his glory. There was joy in the heart of every one when they saw the sun rise. Every one of them descended from his chariot and saluted the sun. The fifteenth day of the great war dawned. It was the fifth day of the commandership of Drona. In the light of the sun both the Kauravas and the Pandavas saw the devastation that had been caused in their armies. But there was no time to think of all that. They had to continue the fight.

Just when the moon rose, there was a discussion between Duryodhana and Drona. As usual, Duryodhana began to accuse Drona of being partial to Arjuna. He said: "You are our commander. You have so many astras that can help you win easily. Still, there is so much ruin caused in our ranks today because of the Pandavas and Arjuna in particular. There is no one who can equal you in archery. Not the Pandavas nor anyone else from the heavens. Still, it is our special misfortune that your honoured self is more fond of the Pandavas. You are fighting softly with your dear Arjuna. You are siding with him all the time".

As he sat there listening to the harsh words of Duryodhana, Drona thought of his position. His entire life came to his mind's eye. He thought of his boyhood and his friendship with Drupada. He thought of his Aswatthama and his desire to taste milk. Drona came to Panchala with the hope of living happily in the court of Drupada. That desire was very foolish. It was then that he first became acquainted with the arrogance and selfishness of kings. He should have been sensible then. He should have gone back to the forest, to the good, peaceful atmosphere, where goodness was contagious. But he had taken the wrong turning when he was at the crossroad. He allowed anger to enter his heart, anger against Drupada, and a desire to teach him a lesson and kill his arrogance. That made him go to Hastinapura Bheeshma had given him a clue as to how the future of the Kauravas would shape itself. When Drona told him about the humiliation he had experienced in the court of Drupada, and added that he had come to Hastinapura to find a way of taking revenge on the haughty king, Bheeshma, the wise old man, had smiled and said: "You have come to the proper place. I have hundreds of grandchildren who are eager

to learn archery". Bheeshma's voice had been full of pain and sarcasm when he said that. Drona had thought that he had done a wise thing in coming to Hastinapura. It was the most foolish act of his.

Life in Hastinapura made him lose all the gentleness and sweetness that should have been part of him. Instead, he became a man with an obsession: the desire to punish a man who had been proud enough to insult him, the great Drona. He realised now, that he was just as proud and arrogant as Drupada had been. In his desire for revenge he had committed moral suicide. He had become just a paid servant at the court of Hastinapura. Arjuna punished Drupada for the sake of his guru. But Drona had lost the power to enjoy it. His anger was gone. It was just the principle of it. As soon as he saw Drupada he said: "I just wanted you to learn a lesson. Let us now be friends". He thought that these few words were enough to wipe out a decade of hatred. But he had forgotten that others were also capable of hatred. Drupada had prayed for a son who could kill Drona.

Drona had seen the increasing hatred between the Pandava boys and the sons of the king, Dhritarashtra. He should have been more careful. He was watching it and he did nothing about it. When the education of the princes was over and his revenge had been taken he should have left Hastinapura and gone back to the forest. He should have shed this cloak of worldliness and emerged out of it. He did not do it. He saw the tragedy that was taking shape. When the game of dice was being played he knew that it was unjust. He did not dare to give even his opinion then. He allowed the injustice to the Pandavas. When they had been sent to the forest, Duryodhana had come to him. He was afraid that a war would be fought. Drona had told him that he would fight for him, and asked him not to be afraid. That was a foolish thing to have done. But he had taken the first step in the road of sin. He had to go on. There was no turning back.

Now Bheeshma had fallen. Drona had taken up the commander ship of the Kaurava army. The honour paid to him turned his head. He impulsively asked Duryodhana to ask a boon of him. Duryodhana wanted him to bring Yudhishthira to him as a captive. He could have refused. But he did not. Bheema's words had burnt him like fire. It was all true. That was why he could not fight with him. Truth is so difficult to face. He had done a terrible thing. Yesterday he had killed a young child in cold blood. The words of Duryodhana the other night had stung him to the quick. In his anger he had promised to kill one great warrior on the side of the Pandavas. He had formed the Padmavyuha, knowing that the child Abhimanyu would get caught in it. It was a crime for which he would never be for-

given. He had wronged his dear Arjuna. He had broken his heart. And yet Arjuna spoke to him with affection. He had said: "You are my guru. I am like a son to you. In fact, there is no difference between me and your Aswatthama. You have said so once". The brave and noble Arjuna was yesterday engaged in fighting with these sinners and he tried against all odds to avenge the cruel murder of his son. Drona had been asked to prevent this act of justice. He had agreed to it. And now, this tirade from Duryodhana.

Drona's mind was suddenly disgusted with the entire proceedings. His heart was just being churned up by the many memories of the past and the present. He had committed so much sin for this man Duryodhana, and here he was accusing him of being partial to Arjuna. His arrogance was intolerable. Gratitude was a feeling which was a stranger to the heart of Duryodhana.

Drona sat listening to Duryodhana. Suddenly his eyes flashed, and he said: "You just exasperate me with your words. I have been doing my best, you know that. In your desire for victory, you are speaking like this to me. It is not right to send an astra on poor innocent soldiers who do not know it. But if you command me to do so, I will, since I am bound to obey you. I have already taken an oath that I will not remove this armour of mine until I kill all the Panchalas and the Kekayas. I will be killed, but that is not of any importance to you. But if you think that Arjuna can be defeated, I can only say that you are entertaining fond hopes. He cannot be defeated. There is no point in my telling you about the prowess of Arjuna. You will not like it. But I tell you for the last time, Arjuna cannot be conquered by anyone".

Duryodhana hated this praise of the enemy. He was sick of hearing it from all of them again and again. He said: "We will defeat him. I am here. My Dussasana, Sakuni and Radheya are also here. The four of us can easily defeat him". Drona smiled scathingly but said nothing. Duryodhana continued: "Let us divide the army into two. We will take one portion of it and attack the Pandavas with your favourite pupil. You can fight if you wish to or you can stay away from the field thinking of the greatness of Arjuna".

These harsh words of Duryodhana were too wounding. Drona still did not lose his poise. He said: "Duryodhana, I wish you well in this tremendous enterprise of yours. There is no one who is able to defy Arjuna. Try it yourself. There is nothing like finding out for yourself. You have always been full of sin and you are ever cruel and suspicious. You can never recognize those who are fond of you and who are interested in your welfare. Go and fight with the great Arjuna. You are a kshatriya born in the illustrious House of the

Kurus. You are just aching to fight. Go then, and fight. Why did you cause the death of so many kings for your sake? Why did you stay away from the fight all these days? After all, the great war that is being fought on this Kurukshetra is being fought to please you and your wilfulness. It is but right that you should fight too! This sinful Sakuni, this breeze which fanned the spark of jealousy in your heart into a blazing flame of hatred, this man is the root of all this destruction. I hope there is a special hell for him. He will suffer for his sins. I am sure of that. He is a kshatriya too. He is very intelligent. This man, who is skilful in playing the game of dice, will certainly defeat Arjuna. Surely he can do what no one has been able to do so far! This cheater can easily defeat the Pandavas in open warfare! Why! In the court at Hastinapura I have often heard you say, 'We three, Dussasana, my dear Radheya and myself can easily kill those cousins of ours'. I have heard this again and again, in every discussion about the Pandavas, and God knows how many discussions there used to be! Right then! Do what you promised to do. There they are, every one of them, ready to meet you. Duryodhana, be a kshatriya. Use your weapons of steel and give your tongue some rest. After all, you have lived a full and happy life. You have performed many good acts too. You have tasted the cup of joy. You have drained it to the last drop. You have enjoyed power as no one else has done. You do not owe anyone anything. You have cleared all your debts. You have enjoyed life to the full. It is but right that you should go out and fight with your enemies. Death at the hands of the Pandavas will indeed be a crowning glory to your eventful life. Do your duty at least now and fight with your enemies. Your death will be glorious". Drona stopped talking. He divided the army into two and set out to the battle-field to fight for this ungrateful man till the last breath lingered in his body.

Chapter 30

THE ONE LIE

Krishna saw the two divisions of the army. He told Arjuna: "I think it will be better if you go towards the left wing where your enemies are all together". Bheema too saw the two portions and said: "Arjuna, Arjuna, please let us accost our dear enemies. We will now be able to do what we have sworn to do". Thus prompted by Krishna

and Bheema, Arjuna began to attack the army. The four Kauravas faced Arjuna as they had sworn to in the presence of Drona. They were not finding it as easy as they thought. It was not easy to fight with Arjuna. The sun could not be seen because of the arrows and dust that were rising up in the sky. That half of the army was routed in no time.

Drona had gone to the northern side of the field and there he was harassing the Panchalas, the Matsyas and the Kekayas. He looked like a heap of fire burning without any smoke. So full of lustre was he that every one trembled at the sight of this fiery brahmin. The Panchalas, the old enemies of Drona, were faring badly. Drona killed three of the grandsons of Drupada. This was a terrible blow to Drupada. He rushed on Drona, and Virata came to his help. The two veterans were engaged in fighting with the terrible Drona. They fought for a while. But Drona was not just angry today. He was furious with the world in general and with the Panchalas in particular. He took two sharp javelins and with them he killed Drupada and Virata. There was a great shout in the army of the Pandavas when these two great men fell. Dhrishtadyumna saw his father and his sons killed at the same time. He rushed at the terrible Drona with the words: "If I do not kill this man today in the battle, I will lose all the punya I have acquired so far". He attacked the army of the Kauravas. The Pandavas with Arjuna rushed to the help of Dhrishtadyumna, and the Kauravas led by Duryodhana came to the help of Drona. There was great anger in the heart of all the Pandavas. The battle that was fought was the most dreadful. Dhrishtadyumna could not face Drona: so well protected was he and he was himself too fierce. Bheema looked on for a moment and said: "It looks as though the oath of my dear friend is going to be false. Dhrishtadyumna, you have taken an oath in the hearing of all the heroes that you will kill Drona today. If you cannot do it, I will help you. I will kill this sinful man". Bheema rushed towards the Kaurava army and joined the others and fought, trying to get at Drona.

The battle that was fought on the fifteenth day of the great war was the most terrible of all. Drona had lost all sense of dharma. He was an incarnation of fire today. He was more angry than Bheeshma was on the ninth day of the war. The destruction caused by Drona in the Pandava army was something unimaginable. No one could be seen. Everyone was enveloped in the gloom caused by the arrows of Drona. Radheya, Drona, Arjuna, Yudhishthira, were all there, but no one could be recognized. There were some duels fought. But in the presence of Drona and his fury, in front of this carnage, no one had any spirit to fight duels. Duryodhana fought a duel with Nakula

and he was defeated. Dussasana fought with Sahadeva and he too was defeated. Bheema fought with Radheya. He fought very well but he fainted away in the end, unable to bear the arrows of Radheya. He had to go away in the chariot of Nakula.

The most spectacular duel that was fought was the one between Drona and Arjuna. It was the most wonderful duel. It was a grand display of all the divine astras which both had in their possession. Arjuna could not win and neither could Drona. It was a terrible duel. In his mind Drona was appreciating every shot of Arjuna, but he had to keep on fighting. To the consternation of the entire army, Drona took up the great Brahmastra. It caused a great commotion of the elements. The earth quaked in fear and the sky became dark. Drona sent the Brahmastra towards Arjuna, and a miracle was seen. Arjuna sent the same Brahmastra and the two astras destroyed each other. Drona gave up fighting with Arjuna and turned his attention to the Panchala army once again. Dhrishtadyumna and Dussasana fought a duel. Dussasana was made to go back, defeated. The fight became general once again.

A duel was fought between Duryodhana and Satyaki. It was very interesting and it was memorable because of the conversation between the two. Both were raining arrows on each other. Both were smiling as was the custom of heroes. When they were facing each other, the smile was more pronounced since they had been friends once upon a time. Duryodhana thought of the many incidents that had happened to them when they were together. He felt angry with himself since he had to fight with a friend of his youth. He said: "Satyaki, what a hateful thing it is, that I am doing! I hate myself for my anger and my pride, my arrogance and my love for the kingdom. These things, and the fact that I am a kshatriya, make me fight with you and you with me. There was once a time when you were dearer to me than my very life and so was I to you. Satyaki, I suddenly think of the many happy days we spent together. Now we are facing each other on the battle-field and all the happenings of the long ago have become old and sere. If it had not been for my avarice, we would not have been fighting as we are now". Duryodhana brushed away his tears and continued to fight.

Satyaki was returning his arrows and, while fighting, he smiled at Duryodhana and said: "My dear Duryodhana, my friend, this is not the sabha where we used to sit and talk: it is not the home of our guru either, where we would all play together when we were young and care-free". Duryodhana said: "What a distance of time! Where are those games we played then! I find that we are now fighting this dreadful duel with each other. What a ruthless thing it is, this thing

called fate! If only I had not been so full of avarice, this would never have happened. I feel that fate is the most powerful opponent I have. Radheya is right. There is nothing that can be done, if fate has decided our future". Satyaki said: "This is the rule set down for all kshatriyas: to fight, without caring whether we are friends or not. A guru has to be killed by his pupil and a friend has to be killed by a friend. If you do really hold me dear in your heart, Duryodhana, please kill me soon. If I am killed by you, I am sure to reach the heavens meant for good people. I cannot bear this agony in the mind of a friend. Please use all your power and kill me".

They set their minds on the duel and spoke no more. Satyaki defeated Duryodhana in the duel and went away from his presence. This duel was too much of an emotional strain for Satyaki. He had seen the proud Duryodhana eaten up with pride and arrogance. He could bear that. But this Duryodhana was new to him. This man, who was remembering the past, was hurting him too much. Satyaki could not bear to see the tears in the eyes of the Kuru monarch. The moment was too sacred to him. He would not talk about it to anyone. Satyaki went away to another part of the field. He would not risk meeting Duryodhana again.

The fight had become general again. The Pandava army was just helpless in the grip of Drona. He had despatched his terrible astras against the army. Twenty thousand men were wiped out in a single moment because of the Brahmastra he had despatched against the soldiers. The army was being tossed about like the waves of the sea in a raging storm. Everyone was looking to Arjuna to save the army from this upheaval. It was not possible for anyone to face the glow on the face of the great Drona. The Pandavas spoke to one another. They said: "It is not like our acharya at all. This man who is fighting is someone who has become so different. It is not Drona. It is some devil which has entered into him and is making him behave in this inhuman fashion. No one can face him. He is blazing like the fire at the time of the end of the world". Krishna saw the panic in the army. He saw that Drona was fighting an unjust war by using the divine astras on men who were strangers to them. He said: "Yudhishthira, this man cannot be defeated in the war. If he is allowed to continue, you will not have a single living soldier in your army by the time evening falls. Unless something drastic is done there is no hope for us. Unless he is made to lay down his weapons we cannot kill him. I am sure he will stop fighting if he is made to throw them down of his own accord. My dear Yudhishthira, Drona has today adopted unrighteousness in his fighting. We will also use unfair methods to kill him. If the oath of Dhrishtadyumna is to be true, we will have

to do something to make him throw away his weapons. I have a feeling that he will do it if he hears that his beloved son Aswatthama is dead. Drona will give up all thoughts of fighting if he realizes that his son is dead. Let us tell him that Aswatthama is dead".

Arjuna did not like this suggestion. Others did approve of it. Yudhishthira approved of it with great difficulty. Bheema went into the heart of his own army and with his mace he killed an elephant by name Aswatthama. He came to the presence of Drona and with shame suffusing his face exclaimed: "Aswatthama is dead". Hearing his words, Drona was upset. He felt faint. But soon he recovered himself. He thought of his son. He felt that no one could defeat Aswatthama. He would not believe Bheema. Drona shook off his worry and continued to fight with Dhrishtadyumna. He fought with double the vigour he was using till now. His fury took on a dreadful form. Again he invoked the Brahmastra and, against all codes of fair fighting, he sent it to destroy all the army of the Panchalas and the Somakas. There was an inhuman slaughter of the army, and the rishis, who were in the sky watching the progress of the war, now came to Drona, unseen by human eyes. They had with them Bharadwaja, the father of Drona. They said: "Drona, you have begun to fight in a manner which is not righteous. The time has come when you should die. Your end has come. Look at us and lay down your arms. After seeing us, you should not continue this cruel deed. You are a master of all the Vedas and the Vedangas as befits a brahmin. You must not be a kshatriya any more. It does not become a great man like you to be cruel. Abandon this curtain of ignorance which clouds your vision. Set your mind on the Eternal. The period of your sojourn on earth is ended. Your sending the Brahmastra is not a good thing. It is a wrong thing you have done. Lay down your arms".

Listening to their words and remembering the words of Bheema, Drona became suddenly dispirited. In front of him he saw Dhrishtadyumna, the man who had been born for the sole purpose of killing him. Drona turned his eyes on Yudhishthira and said: "My child, I want you to tell me if it is true that my son is dead". He was sure that Yudhishthira would never speak an untruth, even if he were to get the entire world because of that. Ever since he was a child, Yudhishthira had not spoken a single falsehood. On that certainty, his guru asked him if it was true that Aswatthama was dead. Krishna had already anticipated this emergency. He had told Yudhishthira: "If this Drona fights for half a day more, I can assure you there will be nothing left of your army. It is your duty to speak this lie for the sake of saving your army. I know that it is a sin to tell a lie. But under these circumstances you are allowed to tell a lie. This lie

spoken by you for saving the lives of so many will not be a lie. The sin will not cling to you. I will assure you of that". Yudhishthira had agreed to speak the lie. Bheema said: "I went and killed the elephant of the king of Malava. The elephant is called Aswatthama. I went near the presence of the guru and shouted that Aswatthama is dead. But he did not pay much heed to my words. You must listen to the words of Krishna. You must tell our guru that his son is dead. He will certainly believe you. He has so much respect for you". Yudhishthira agreed to speak the untruth because that was the only way to save his army. When the great Drona asked him, "My child, I want you to tell me if it is true that my son is dead", Yudhishthira said: "Aswatthama is dead". Softly he added, "the elephant called Aswatthama".

It is said that the chariot of Yudhishthira was always four inches above the ground because of his dharma. But now, as soon as he spoke these words, his chariot descended to the earth and touched the ground. Yudhishthira was today like any other mortal on the earth. He walked like other men.

Hearing the words of Yudhishthira, the great Drona lost all interest in fighting. He fell down in a faint. When he roused himself up and resumed the fight his heart was not in it. Dhrishtadyumna approached him. All the time he had been stationed in front of Drona's chariot. He shot a sharp arrow at Drona. It was not counteracted with as much power as before. Drona saw that his hand, which had been raining arrows in an unending stream till then, had suddenly become fatigued. He could not summon his astras either. They would not do his bidding as readily as they used to. Drona was very angry. He took up another bow, a strong bow, the gift of his guru Angirasa, and began to cover his opponent Dhrishtadyumna with arrows. He almost regained his lost power of fighting. He fought a fierce duel with Dhrishtadyumna. Dhrishtadyumna's bow was cut, his horses were killed and he was without a chariot. With a sword in his hand Dhrishtadyumna rushed at the chariot of Drona. He had every intention of killing him. Drona broke his sword with his arrows, and also his shield. Dhrishtadyumna was absolutely helpless and without any defence. Drona shot arrows at the defenceless man. These arrows were very short. They were called Vaitasmikas. They were meant for an opponent who is very close. There was no way of fighting these arrows. There were only a few people who knew about the Vaitasmikas. They were Kripa, Arjuna, Drona, Radheya, Krishna, Pradyumna, Satyaki and Abhimanyu. Drona had every intention of killing Dhrishtadyumna with these arrows when he was absolutely at his mercy.

Satyaki was looking on and he sent ten arrows from his bow:

these ten arrows cut the arrows of the acharya. Satyaki released Dhrishtadyumna from the death grip of Drona. Arjuna and Krishna shouted for joy. They were too far away to interfere in the duel between Drona and Dhrishtadyumna. Arjuna was busy keeping the other Kaurava heroes at bay, even as he was on the tenth day when the great Bheeshma fell. Arjuna said: "Krishna, Satyaki pleases me immensely. Look how skilfully he is plying his chariot so that he may be near at hand to help his friend. He is the favourite of all of us. Yudhishthira, Nakula, Bheema and Sahadeva love him as much as I love him". Satyaki was stealing the show that day when the duel between Drona and Dhrishtadyumna was being fought. As was the usual practice with them, the Kaurava heroes began to surround Satyaki on all sides.

CHAPTER 31

THE FALL OF DRONA

In spite of the words of the rishis, in spite of the fact that his son was dead, Drona was not ready to die. He fought like a young man of sixteen. He went on with the destruction of the army. He destroyed twenty-four thousand kshatriyas and still he was not satisfied. His anger clouded his mind and again he took up the Brahmastra in his hand. Bheema rushed to Dhrishtadyumna who was without a chariot or weapon. Bheema placed him in his chariot and the two of them began to fight with Drona. They counteracted all his astras and still the man was not vanquished. Satyaki had taken the place of Bheema. Now Bheema advanced to the chariot of Drona. He stood leaning against the great Drona's chariot. He was as angry as a lion.

Bheema looked at the acharya and said: "If brahmins had continued to practise their dharma, without taking up the work of kshatriyas, the race of kshatriyas would not have been destroyed at all. They say that being compassionate and refraining from hurting others, is the virtue of the highest order, and that the brahmin is the home of all virtues. But you are different. You are a great brahmin. But you are a brahmin just by birth. By profession you are a butcher. You have been killing thousands and thousands of men who have all been faithful to their professions, unlike you. You are too fond of wealth and you are blinded to the true value of things by your ignorance. Why do you want all this wealth? Is it for the sake of your wife and children? Your only son is dead and still you are continuing this

work of a butcher. You teach dharma to others and you will not follow it yourself. Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

Bheema's words could always hurt Drona. He was the one man who was frank enough to say what he felt. On the battle-field, when he was trying to guard the vyuha, Bheema had spoken words which hurt him. And now, today, it was unbearable. In a moment Drona realized that all the words of Bheema were true. He realized that he was himself in the wrong. Suddenly Drona decided to give up fighting. He dropped his bow and arrows. He called out the names of Duryodhana and Radheya. He said: "Radheya, Duryodhana, Kripa, fight very carefully from now on. I am laying down my arms. I am not fighting any more. Guard yourselves against the Pandavas".

Drona sat down on the terrace of his chariot. His mind was bent on giving up his life. He assumed the position adopted for the practice of yoga. Drona became blind and deaf to all that was taking place around him. His concentration became intense. Dhrishtadyumna advanced with his sword in his hand. He had every intention of killing Drona. Arjuna was overcome with pity for his acharya. He shouted: "Do not kill him! Do not kill Drona! Capture him: bring him alive, as a captive, but do not kill him!" Arjuna's words fell on deaf ears. Dhrishtadyumna went near the still form of Drona. With his sword Dhrishtadyumna cut off the head of Drona. There was a glow which ascended to the heavens. Drona had joined the rishis who were assembled in the skies. Sanjaya, who had been granted the power to see everything which happened on the field, saw it. The others knew nothing: with the exception of Yudhishthira, Kripa and Krishna.

Dhrishtadyumna's body was drenched with the blood of Drona. He held the sword in one hand and the head of Drona in the other. He jumped down from the chariot. In the midst of shouts of horror from the heroes on either side, Dhrishtadyumna threw the head of the great Drona on the ground. The oath of Dhrishtadyumna had been fulfilled. As soon as he descended from the chariot of Drona, Bheema rushed up to him and embraced him very warmly. They danced together in ecstasy. Bheema said: "My friend, happily, your oath has been accomplished. I will embrace you again when the sutaputra Radheya is dead, and again when Duryodhana is killed".

Chapter 32

DISCUSSIONS IN THE PANDAVA CAMP—I

Duryodhana would not believe that his commander was dead. It was not possible for anyone to believe that Drona had suddenly decided not to fight and was killed. He was the one man who could keep all of them hopeful of winning the war. With the death of Drona died all hope in the heart of Duryodhana. It was evident to him that they would never be able to kill the Pandavas. The Kauravas lost all hope.

The Pandava army presented a contrast to this depression. Duryodhana was more unhappy today than he was when Bheeshma fell. The acharya had done so much for him. He had told him again and again that he would not remove his armour until his last breath lingered in his body. In his selfishness Duryodhana had caused his death. Five days after the fall of Bheeshma, Drona had died and with him died all the power of the Kauravas. Duryodhana was desperately unhappy.

The Kaurava army was retreating in panic. It was then that the great Aswatthama advanced with his army. He could not understand why the army was in such a panic. He looked at Duryodhana whose face was pale with anguish. Aswatthama saw that everyone looked as though a great calamity had befallen them. He turned his puzzled look on Duryodhana and said: "What is the meaning of this? Radheya looks as though he has lost the war. All of you seem to be labouring under some great sorrow. What is the matter? Has anyone dear to you been killed? Who is gone? With my father to command your army,. what could have happened? Tell me". Duryodhana could not tell him. He looked at Kripa and said: "You will have to tell him. I cannot plunge him in grief. I cannot bear to tell him". Gently, Kripa broke the news to Aswatthama. He told him about the outrage committed by Dhrishtadyumna. He told him how the others had tried to stop him. He told him about the lie spoken by Yudhishthira. He told him everything that happened.

Aswatthama's anger was terrible. Even the Kauravas winced under his fury. He said: "I am ashamed of Yudhishthira and his falsehood. War is a very uncertain thing. Lives will be lost. If the fight had been fair there would have been no regrets. If my father had died in a fair fight, I would have reconciled myself to the fact that it is the rule of war that people should die. But I cannot bear this insult to my father. He died fighting and he has reached heaven. I know

that. But I will punish the man who insulted my father. I will kill that Dhrishtadyumna. He will suffer for what he has done. I will punish the eldest of the Pandavas who spoke a lie to save himself from my father's fury. This earth will drink the blood of those sinners Dhrishtadyumna and Yudhishthira. It is terrible to think that my father should have been killed like a man who has no one to love him, when I am here. What is the use of my prowess and my power over the divine astras when I could not use even one of them to protect my father? It is not good to talk about oneself. But I have to. Let the Pandavas and Krishna see me today. I am going to destroy them all with a single astra of mine. Even if they try to escape into the nether regions, they cannot escape death. I will cause a dreadful storm that will kill all of them in a moment. I am sure of that. Let them try and protect themselves and their precious Dhrishtadyumna. I will laugh at their helplessness. I have with me the great astra called Narayanastra. It was given to my father by the Lord himself. It should not be used on innocent people. But I am going to use it. I am not worried about the consequences. I will see the Pandavas dead. That is enough for me. I will be terrible today. Duryodhana, you will be lord of the world in a matter of moments. I can assure you of that". The words of Aswatthama put new life into the Kaurava army. They began to blow their conchs and trumpets and, led by Aswatthama, they proceeded towards the Pandava army.

The Pandavas were roused out of their complacency by the sound of trumpets and conchs. They could hear the approach of the army. Yudhishthira said: "When Drona fell, the enemies were down-hearted. It looked as though they had given up all hopes of defeating us. Now, suddenly, I hear them returning. I cannot guess what has given them new life. I can hear the roar of someone. Who can be leading them back to the front?" Arjuna said: "I know who he is. It is Aswatthama, the son of our guru. The most terrible man to oppose, he is coming to meet us in battle. He is like the God of Death. He is more powerful than Indra or even Vishnu. He has been born by the grace of Lord Sankara. He is like Sankara, with his bow like the great Pinaka of the Lord. He is coming to punish us for the killing of his noble father. Aswatthama has heard about the insult offered by Dhrishtadyumna to his father. In your desire for victory, my lord, you have spoken an untruth. Our guru thought that you would never tell a lie and so he asked *you* if his son was really dead. You have today done a very unrighteous thing. That was why he threw down his bow and sat in meditation. You made the acharya weaponless. You allowed the outrage on him by Dhrishtadyumna who was his pupil. Try and do what you can to protect Dhrishtadyumna from the wrath of the son

of the acharya. Not all of us together will be able to do it. I tried my best to prevent Dhrishtadyumna from doing it. But he would not listen. I am sorry to say that you have not been doing right today. Drona was very fond of us. He treated us like a father. For the sake of ruling the kingdom for a few years, you have caused the death of our guru. I think we should have abandoned our everything rather than hurt our beloved guru. You are doomed to hell for this unrighteous act of yours. Your name will always be tainted because of this falsehood you have spoken".

All the heroes, who were listening to the tirade of Arjuna, stood silent. Bheema was speechless for a moment with anger. Then he looked at his brother with red eyes and said: "You disgust me with your words, my brother. You talk like a forest dweller who has abandoned everything. I do not like your words. You are not a brahmin and you talk like one. What is the meaning of the word Kshatriya? It means, one who rescues others from injuries. You are powerful like Indra. You are capable of winning the entire world at the point of your sword. Please do not behave like a mendicant whose only glory is his humility! I am happy to see that you are at least following your profession! You talk to our worthy brother about righteousness. When did he swerve away from righteousness? I want you to answer my question.

"His kingdom was taken away from him by means which were not righteous. Draupadi was dragged to the court by that animal Dussasana and she was insulted before our very eyes. Yudhishthira was banished to the forest by means which were unrighteous. He was made to wear tree bark and deer skin, and this saint among men spent twelve years in the forest. He spent another year in the court of Virata as a courtier. Can anything be more terrible than that? This king, who had the entire earth to himself, this our brother who has performed the Rajasuya and who had been adored by all the kings of the world, this king I say, allowed himself to be hit on the forehead by an ordinary man and yet he spoke not a word in protest. Was it cowardice or was it because he was righteous that he went through all that suffering? Tell me that. When you and I and all of us were clamouring for war, this saint among men asked for five villages. Was that cowardice? Do you say that it was fear for Duryodhana that made him ask for those five villages? Or was it his gentle and righteous nature that abhorred war? Do you call that righteous or do you not? Tell me that. You dare to suggest that he spoke that untruth in his desire to rule the kingdom! You dare to accuse this man of unrighteousness! This man, who is so full of compassion that he cannot bear to see even his enemies killed! When the gandharvas were in the Dwaitavana

and when they captured Duryodhana, was it unrighteousness which made him send you and me and the twins to rescue him?

"You have always been saying: 'When the war comes, we will do our utmost to right the wrongs done to Yudhishthira by the sons of Dhritarashtra'. Depending on you and your words, I had hopes of avenging the many injuries done to our brother. I had hopes of punishing these men. I was quiet all these days because this saintly Yudhishthira thought that it would not be righteous if we fought before the expiry of the thirteen years.

"You have heard Radheya speak to me yesterday. He called me a glutton and a fool and that I should stay in the kitchen. How is it your blood did not boil at those words? You did not seem to mind it, evidently. Radheya is still alive! After all these years, you have suddenly begun to talk of righteousness. Do not dare to speak to Yudhishthira like that: to Yudhishthira who is the image of Dharma. If you are so upset by the death of that sinful brahmin who was absolutely heartless, you are welcome to it. I do not have any respect for a man who is not true to his profession. It includes you too, if you are going to be a virtuous person all on a sudden. You have Krishna by your side and yet you have the audacity to praise the son of that brahmin, this Aswatthama. How can you insult the greatest man that has been born on the earth? You do not deserve the friendship of Krishna. He is the Lord and he has approved of the 'lie' of Yudhishthira. You think that you are wiser than the wisest! I am sorry, Arjuna, but your words are not the words that ought to be spoken by a younger brother to his elder brother who is the greatest guru. I do not approve of you and your assumption of virtue".

Bheema became silent after this. Yudhishthira was touched by the speech of Bheema, his favourite brother. He embraced him and said: "You are indeed my child. My fearless Bheema, I thank you for your words of love. Hurt by my action and the words of Arjuna, I find so much comfort in your love for me". Bheema spoke again. He said: "Arjuna, if you have so much respect for Aswatthama, you can sit here and sing his praises. I will go and fight with him. I am not afraid of him and his astras as you seem to be. It amuses me to see the great Arjuna who is called Jishnu, sitting here and saying that there is no one who can defy the son of his beloved acharya. I am able to defy him. I will do it".

Dhrishtadyumna spoke. He said: "Arjuna, you say that your acharya was great. How was he great? Let me tell you the six duties of a brahmin. He should assist at sacrifices. He should perform sacrifices. He is allowed to give away gifts. He is allowed to receive gifts too. He must teach. He must himself be a student. These are the

duties of a brahmin. Can you tell me honestly which of these duties were performed by your guru? He taught: but not the Vedas. He studied: but not the holy books. He performed a sacrifice and he assisted in a sacrifice. But it was not a sacrifice to please the gods. It was a sacrifice to please that most sinful of all men, the great Duryodhana, and he has sacrificed all the human beings who came to help you win this war. He is a cruel man who has adopted the profession of a kshatriya. Even there, he is not a righteous kshatriya. He has been killing the army using divine astras. This is a thing which no kshatriya will dare to do. He has transgressed the rules of fair fight. He used Adharma to kill thousands and thousands of men, and I used unrighteous means to kill this one sinful man. I did it so that so many people may be saved. Why do you keep on blaming me for the killing of Drona?

"I was born to kill Drona. You know about it. The world knows it. Drona knew it. You know that for the last fifteen days I have been stationed in front of the chariot of Drona just for this. You did not say anything then. Now, after I have killed him, you try to blame me instead of congratulating me. For the killing of just one son of yours, for the killing of Abhimanyu, you took such a dreadful oath and killed Jayadratha. I do not think the setting of the sun was very righteous. It was unrighteous. You cheated Jayadratha and killed him. I have a father killed. My brothers were killed. My sons were killed. All this was done by this one man, and, when I avenge the death of all of them by this one act, you turn against me and blame me. This Drona was an unrighteous man. He was fighting an unrighteous war. I do not feel that any sin will cling to me or to Yudhishthira for this act we have done for the good of the army. Even after killing him, my fury has not abated. I have lost all those who were dear to me because of the acharya, and I have avenged their deaths.

"You say that a kshatriya should not kill his guru. But it has been the dharma of a kshatriya not to remember his relationship to his opponent. Was not the great and noble Bhagadatta, the friend of your father Indra? He was your guru and you killed him. The great Bheeshma was your guru and he was your grandfather. He was more than a father to you. He was your guru, Arjuna. Did you not kill him when he had abandoned his weapons? Why then do you call my act wrong? If you think that you did the right thing when you killed Bheeshma, why do you taunt me who has done the same thing? For a kshatriya, no sin will cling to him if he kills his near and dear people if they oppose him in war. You are left alive, Arjuna, with my forgiveness for your words because of Draupadi, my sister, and because of her sons. I would otherwise have killed you for this".

Satyaki could not bear to hear his dear Arjuna being insulted. He sprang up and said: "Listen to me, Dhrishtadyumna. I am not going to allow you to insult my friend and my guru. You have done a sinful thing, and you boast about it in the midst of righteous men. You killed your guru when he was weaponless and you insulted him by throwing his head on the ground. You and your ancestors will be in hell for this dastardly crime. How can you say that Bheeshma was killed by Arjuna when he was without his weapons? He himself wanted to be slain. He had told them as much. He was killed because of your brother and not because of Arjuna. It was because of Sikhandi that Bheeshma threw his weapons down. Do not dare to speak a word about Arjuna. If you do, I will split your head with this mace of mine".

CHAPTER 33

DISCUSSIONS IN THE PANDAVA CAMP—II

Dhrishtadyumna laughed loud and long at the words of Satyaki. He said: "I have heard you. I have even forgiven you for these words. Satyaki, it has been said that forgiveness is the greatest of all virtues. Hence I am trying to assume it. But let me assure you, it is not easy. This is the most amazing thing in the world: an unrighteous man trying to accuse another of a sin the like of which he himself has committed. You, who killed Bhoorisravas when he had turned his mind away from thoughts of battle, you, I say, dare to talk to me of my actions! What a hero you are! Bhoorisravas had his arm cut by Arjuna, and very bravely you cut his head though everyone said that it should not be done. When he had you under his power, he insulted you. You should yourself have punished him for that. You borrowed the help of Arjuna for that and killed Bhoorisravas. Do not talk to me about righteousness. You make me sick. I do not want to justify my action. But I have to say this. These men, the Kauravas, have been steeped in sin. Ever since they tried to kill Bheema with poison, they have tried all methods and all unrighteous, to kill the Pandavas. You know it and I know it and everyone knows it. Think how Salya was lured away to the side of Duryodhana! That was not right or just. Bhoorisravas was killed by you. That was unjust on your part but we did not mind it since it looked so insignificant in front of their other acts. You were first insulted by him. You bore

him an ancient grudge. We did not condemn your act since we knew that you had been provoked.

"Satyaki, you must realize that righteousness is a very difficult word to define. We in the Pandava army have had to do several things which may not be called right by people who enjoy splitting hairs. But then, the term unrighteousness is just as difficult to define. The end and aim of war is victory. Considering that the cause of the Pandavas is righteous, we have all been fighting so that they may be victorious. We had to face the sinful Drona for days together. When he began to lose all his good qualities, something had to be done about it. Yudhishthira did not speak a lie in the usual sense of the word. For the sake of the good of his army he sacrificed his good name and his reputation. He must be honoured for that lie. It is a great lie that has been spoken by a man who sets his life and all this world as equal to a handful of dust. Such a man has been accused by all of you. You had a family feud with Bhoorisravas and you killed him. And I had a feud which has been there with this man since the time of my father. So I killed him. I have been accused of unrighteous behaviour. That by Arjuna. I cannot fight with him because he is the husband of my sister. But I am not bound to you by any such bond. I can fight you without any compunction. Come, let me see you break my head with your mace".

Satyaki rushed at Dhrishtadyumna with his mace uplifted. Bheema jumped down from his chariot and caught him from behind. He was dragged along for five paces. The sixth step was controlled by Bheema. Sahadeva approached the two heroes and said: "Please do not be angry with each other. You are both dear to us and we need the affection of both of you. You are both friends too. I know it. Satyaki, you must forgive the words of your friend and your words also must be forgiven by Dhrishtadyumna. Dhrishtadyumna, you are as dear to the Pandavas as your sister is. You must not be wroth with those who love you. Satyaki, you are like Krishna to us. It is not right that there should be dissension amongst ourselves about something which is now swallowed up in the river of the past. Let us now forget it and think of the future". Krishna and Yudhishthira joined in the entreaties of Sahadeva, and peace was brought about with the greatest difficulty. They had to think of the approach of the guru's son. He was advancing on the Pandava army like the sea which has forgotten the restraint which nature has imposed upon it.

CHAPTER 34

THE NARAYANASTRA

The Pandavas prepared themselves for this new danger. Aswatthama had invoked the great Narayanastra. In a moment the sky was covered by millions of arrows and shining discs which descended on the army. Everyone was terrified. People were just being burnt up. There was no escaping the fury of the great astra. Yudhishthira saw all that was happening. He addressed all of them: "I think you should all try to protect yourselves. Dhrishtadyumna, if you value your life, run away from here. Go back to your country. Satyaki, you must go back to Dwaraka. Take all your army with you. Krishna, you know everything. I do not have to tell you what you should do at this juncture. Please desist from fighting, all of you, and try to save yourselves. I will enter the fire and kill myself. Arjuna's anger against me will thus be appeased.

"Yes, Arjuna, I killed the great acharya, the beloved guru of all of us. I killed the man who, you say, was affectionate towards us as a father. It was this man who made six warriors kill my dear child Abhimanyu because he did not have the strength to withstand the prowess of that child. Your acharya should have protected him from the others but, instead, he taught them how to kill him. This was the man who was loving us as a father does. It was this man who sat and watched while Draupadi was dragged into the court of Duryodhana. When she asked him if she was really a slave of the sons of Dhritarashtra, it was this affectionate guru of ours who sat silent, indifferent to her pleadings. It was this guru, affectionate as he was towards us, who swore to Duryodhana that the oath of Arjuna would become futile as far as Jayadratha was concerned. He covered Duryodhana with the divine armour and made him face you so that your oath might become futile. It was with the affection of a father that this man watched us all walk along the streets of Hastinapura and spoke not a word in our favour. It was because he loved us like a father that he assured Duryodhana that he would fight for him, and gave him his word that he would guard that man against the Pandavas if war were to be declared. This was fourteen years ago. It was with the affection of a father that this man fought last night, making the tired soldiers fight after a day of dreadful fighting: all because he could not bear to see the tears in the eyes of Duryodhana! Jayadratha has been killed because of the goodness of Krishna and this father-like guru of ours wanted to punish us for it.

He began the inhuman war in the night when nothing could be seen by anyone. It was because he loved us like a father that this guru of ours sent the powerful Brahmastra against our army. He tried to kill Dhrishtadyumna even after he had been asked by his own father to lay down his arms. With his last breath our guru said: 'Radheya, Duryodhana, guard yourselves against the Pandavas. I am laying down my arms'.

"Arjuna, you say that he loved us like a father. He might have loved you. He was always partial to you. But, as for his fatherly affection which you speak about, it was the privilege of Duryodhana to enjoy that affection. I was told by Krishna that it was for the good of the army that I should speak that untruth. I have always hated lying. But I did speak a lie. Krishna has been my guide, philosopher and friend. You may consider that Drona as your guru. But I consider Krishna as my guru. I am proud to have obeyed him. I told a lie. But I am proud to have spoken that lie. It has saved the lives of so many people. I have been able to do so much good. I am proud of my lie! Do you hear that? I am proud of it. If I go to hell because of this lie, as you have predicted, I am not worried about it. I have lived a righteous life to the best of my ability. I have never thought a single sinful thought. I have always tried to walk in the Path of Truth. This lie of mine seems to me to be without sin. If I *feel* that something is *not* sinful, then *really, it is not sinful.* I have today done a great deed. I am proud of myself. I am now prepared to die. I have never been fond of the kingdom. Unfortunately I have been born a kshatriya. I have thought out everything. If my death will satisfy you, who are so grieved about the killing of your acharya, I am prepared to die. Nothing will please me more. But do not expect me to be sorry for the falsehood I spoke. I am not sorry".

No one could speak after this impassioned speech of Yudhishthira. Bheema was sobbing with emotion. Krishna thought that the time was critical. He said: "Yudhishthira, let us not talk of dying or running away. I know this astra. If you all throw away your weapons and give up all thoughts of opposing it, it will pass over your heads without harming you. The more you oppose it, the more powerful it will become. Take my advice. All of you, please throw away all your weapons and prostrate before the great Narayanastra". The entire army was on the ground, prostrated before the glow and power of the astra.

All of them fell down. All, except one: that was Bheema. He would not bow down to the astra. He said: "I will not prostrate before an astra thrown by Aswatthama. I am not a coward. I will fight". It was a magnificent sight. The entire army was down and

this one man stood like a tall Sala tree, undaunted by the raging storm. Something terrible happened. All the arrows which had been seen in the sky seemed to descend on Bheema and he was completely envelop-ed by it. He began to glow with the power of the terrible astra which was trying to destroy him. His head looked like a furnace. It was dreadful to see him. Still he stood. Arjuna was frantic. He did not know what to do. He despatched the Varunastra which was able to quench the fire to a certain extent. But it was not enough. Bheema was roaring and shouting with pride. He would not give in. He look-ed like the sun at midday with a thousand rays of fire emerging from him. Still he stood. Krishna and Arjuna rushed to the great hero. They pulled out with all their might the weapons he had on his body. They pushed him on the ground and by force made him stay down until the astra passed him by. Bheema was saved.

Krishna said: "What is this you are trying to do, Bheema? You say that you hate the Kauravas and yet you were ready to die so that they may live! What foolishness is this?" It was all over. The great Narayanastra had passed over their heads and the wisdom of Krishna had saved them all from entire annihilation. Duryodhana saw what had happened. He asked Aswatthama to send it again. Aswat-thama smiled ruefully and said: "That is not possible. It can be sent only once. If I try again it will kill me and us. But it is no matter. Duryodhana, they have all fallen at my feet. It means that they have admitted defeat. Death and defeat mean the same to a kshatriya. Their life is such a shame to them from now on since they are all cowards". This comfort was not enough for Duryodhana. He wanted to see them dead. This moral and spiritual death meant nothing to him. He said as much to Aswatthama. He said: "If you cannot send this astra, send something else. You have so many of them at your command. I must see them killed".

Aswatthama attacked Dhrishtadyumna now. It was like the death grip of a lion on an elephant. The fight raged for a long time. All the heroes were trying to help their dear commander. But it was no use trying to fight with this man who was mad with grief and anger. Arjuna came up to him and said: "Let me see the prowess you seem to be so keen on displaying. I have heard of your power, Aswatthama. I have heard of your wisdom, your valour, your bravery. I know too about the affection you have for the sons of the king Dhritarashtra and your hatred for the sons of Pandu. If you are really as powerful as you are reputed to be, let me see some of it. Come and fight with me".

Aswatthama took up the challenge of Arjuna. The fight was won-derful. Both were the disciples of the same master and it was a pleasure to watch them fight. Aswatthama was becoming impatient. He want-

ed to finish off Arjuna soon. The astra belonging to Agni was invoked by him, and he sent it against Arjuna and his army. The army was beginning to be burnt up. Arjuna was wild against this man who fought against all codes of chivalrous fighting. Arjuna invoked the Brahmastra and sent it to quench the fury of the fire. A cool breeze blew and the fury of the two astras had abated. Aswatthama went away from the battle-field. He wanted to be alone with his grief.

There, when he was alone, he met Vyaasa. He asked Vyaasa: "My lord, why did my astras fail? Why did they? How could they?" Vyaasa said: "Aswatthama, you sent them against Nara and Narayana who have been born as Arjuna and Krishna to rid the world of her troubles. It is not possible to defy them or to destroy them. You are foolish in trying to do the impossible. Your father has reached the heavens. There is nothing in it for you to grieve. Go home, my child, and think of tomorrow".

The army of the Kauravas was withdrawn at the end of the day. With a grateful sigh, the Pandava army too went back to the camp. They could sleep tonight. That was the first thought in the minds of all the soldiers. The Kaurava army camp was sunk in gloom. Bheeshma was gone and now on the fifteenth day of the war, they had lost Drona. He was like a great fortress which had, so far, withstood the attack of the Pandava army. But now he was gone. Duryodhana was not able even to think. His mind was almost unhinged because of this dire calamity which had befallen him. Radheya and Dussasana tried in vain to comfort him. So passed the dreadful night.

KARNA
PARVA

CHAPTER 1

RADHEYA IN COMMAND

The fifteenth day of the great war had ended disastrously for the Kauravas. Evening had fallen, and the two armies had returned to their camps. In the night Duryodhana and the others sat in conference, trying to think of a way out of their predicament. He asked them all to give their opinions. The wise Aswatthama spoke. He said: "We want a man who is fond of you, who is capable, efficient and also powerful. Such a man will be able to command the army and lead you to victory. All the heroes assembled here are rich in these qualities. There is no need for you to be depressed. We are all ready to die for you. If Radheya is made the commander of the army, we are sure of victory. Radheya is invincible". Duryodhana was overjoyed to hear the suggestion of Aswatthama. Hope does not die in the heart of man: not as long as there is life in the body. Even after the fall of Bheeshma and Drona, the king had hopes of winning the war with Radheya as the commander of the army.

Duryodhana looked at Radheya with eyes full of affection and said: "Radheya, I know your greatness. I also know the affection you have for me. I now depend on you to steer me over these difficult days. Bheeshma and Drona fought valiantly for me, and they have both fallen. Bheeshma was always fond of the Pandavas. After him we installed Drona as the commander according to your advice. Both have fallen: both by unfair means. They were attacked when they were without weapons. Two defenceless men have been killed by the enemies. But both of them were fighting without their full vigour. They did not want to hurt the five Pandavas. Drona was too fond of Arjuna to fight to his utmost. But you are different. For the first time in this war, I am leaving my army in the hands of one who hates the Pandavas as much as I do. You must lead us all as Kartikeya led the host of the divine army. I ask you very humbly to take up this great task".

Radheya was very happy to hear the words of the king. At last, the time had come when he could repay the debt of affection and gratitude which he owed Duryodhana. He said: "Nothing will please me more than to do this service for you, my king. I will destroy Arjuna in the battle tomorrow and lay the world at your feet. I am eager to fight with them all, and I am eager to kill Arjuna. I am sure to kill him". Duryodhana installed nim as the commander. Radheya was

given the coronation bath and was formally installed as the third commander of the Kaurava army. Duryodhana thought the world to be already his since his Radheya was the commander.

The sixteenth day of the great war dawned. It was wonderful to see Radheya at the head of the army. He looked splendid like the sun which had just risen in the east. He wanted to arrange the army in the Makara vyuha. The mouth of the Makara was Radheya. The eyes were Sakuni and his son Uluka. At the head was stationed Aswatthama. The neck was made up of the sons of Dhritarashtra. At the centre could be seen Duryodhana with his serpent banner. The left foreleg was made up of Kritavarma and his army. The right hind leg was in the keeping of Sushena, the son of Radheya. The left hind leg was in the charge of Salya. The right fore leg was made up of Kripa and his army. The tail was made up of some other brothers of Duryodhana.

Looking at the array of the Kauravas with Radheya as the commander, Yudhishthira said: "Arjuna, look at this army of the Kauravas with Radheya in the van. When I think of the same army just sixteen days back when our grandfather had arranged it in the terrible vyuha which was impenetrable, and now when I see it arranged in the Makara vyuha, I do realise the dwindling in the size. What a great calamity has befallen these men! Think of all the many heroes who were moving about then on the first day like meteors shooting across the sky. Look on their army now. What a sad contrast! Look on Radheya. He is splendid. He is like the moon in the midst of stars. He is the one person on their side who is to be feared. Arjuna, if you kill just this one man, victory is ours. There is no one else worth mentioning".

Arjuna saw the truth of his remarks. He looked at his army. It had also suffered at the hands of the two commanders Bheeshma and Drona and at the hands of Aswatthama. He arranged it in the form of a crescent. The left horn had Bheema guarding it. The right horn had the one and only Dhrishtadyumna to guard it. At the centre was Arjuna: behind him were Yudhishthira, Nakula and Sahadeva. Arjuna's chariot wheels were as usual protected by Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas. The other heroes were placed all along the two sides of the crescent. The trumpets and war drums made music, and the two armies clashed. It was somewhat like the first day's battle. The same procedure was adopted. Drona's unorthodox methods of fighting was a contrast to the more dignified procedure of Radheya. It reminded everyone of Bheeshma's fine and righteous leadership. The Kauravas were able to forget the loss of Bheeshma and Drona when they saw the brave and handsome Radheya in their van.

Early during the fight Bheema was able to kill the proud king

Kshemadhruti. Radheya advanced towards the Pandava army. He was destroying it ruthlessly. Nakula came to the front and accosted Radheya. Bheema and Aswatthama met in a duel. Satyaki met Vinda and Anuvinda, the Kekaya brothers on the side of the Kauravas. (Not to be confused with the Avanti brothers who were killed by Arjuna on the fourteenth day's battle). The king fought with Yudhishthira. What was left of the Samsaptaka army challenged Arjuna. Kripa fought with Dhrishtadyumna, and Sikhandi with Kritavarma. Srutakirti met Salya. Sahadeva challenged the powerful Dussasana. Vinda and Anuvinda were killed by Satyaki after a spectacular fight. The sons of Draupadi were doing excellent work. The fight was going on between Bheema and Aswatthama. Aswatthama was defeated by Bheema and was carried out of the field by his charioteer. Srutakirti was defeated by Salya. Sahadeva defeated Dussasana.

An interesting duel was fought between Radheya and Nakula. Nakula was advancing into the army of the Kauravas with the speed of fire. With the intention of stopping him, Radheya advanced and stationed himself in front of his chariot. Nakula was pleased with his coming. He said: "God is indeed good to me. I have been wanting to meet you since so many days. It is because of you that this Kaurava army is being destroyed by us. You are the root cause of all this evil. If I kill you today, a thorn will be removed from my mind. Come and fight with me". Radheya smiled his supercilious smile. But he spoke words which went well with his chivalry and his noble birth. He spoke as one great archer should to another archer. He said: "You are a great warrior. I am glad to meet you in single fight. Be a man and show your prowess. Let me see if you can do what you propose to do. Fight to the best of your power and I promise you I will fight back and sting your pride".

The fight began. Both were bent on destroying each other. Nakula's bow was cut at the outset. He took up another bow and continued to fight. Radheya's bow was cut now and they both took up new bows and fought on. The fight went on for quite a long time. It was very much like the duel fight between Bheema and Radheya on the day when Jayadratha fell. After that Radheya had fought with Sahadeva. It was Nakula's turn today to be defeated by Radheya. Nakula soon found that he had lost his bow, his horses, his charioteer. He was on the ground. He took up his sword and that was cut away from his hand. The technique of Radheya was typical of him. He cut Nakula's shield and his mace. The wheel of the chariot which he took up in his hand was broken by Radheya. Nakula was absolutely helpless. Radheya laughed his taunting laugh. Nakula turned his face

away from that laugh and fled from the presence of Radheya. He could not bear that laugh any more.

But Radheya would not let him go. Nakula was caught from behind by the bow of Radheya. He had thrown it round the neck of the retreating Nakula who felt so very humiliated. Radheya smiled cruelly at him. He said: "So, all that you said was just boasting. I find that you have not been able to do what you promised to do! Let me hear again those words of bravado which greeted me at the beginning of the duel! My dear Nakula, let this be a lesson to you. Do not try to fight with your superiors. I am far superior to you. I am repeating it for your own good. Fight with your equals. There is nothing in being defeated by your superior. Do not be ashamed of this duel with me. Some day, some day, Nakula, you will remember this duel which you fought with me. I tell you again, do not be ashamed of the fact that I defeated you. Be proud of it. Be proud of the fact that you once fought a duel with the great Radheya. Go home now, my child. Go home, or go to Arjuna and Krishna". Radheya smiled once again and released Nakula from the noose of his bow. He went away bent on destroying the army. Sighing like a serpent which had been cruelly hurt, Nakula went to Yudhishthira. No one saw the tears that glistened at the corners of Radheya's eyes. No one except Krishna. He smiled to himself as if to say: "Radheya is remembering that Nakula is his brother. He will not kill any of the Pandavas except Arjuna. But poor Nakula would rather have been killed than be humiliated like this. But it is all part of the game. He must learn to face this also once in a way".

Chapter 2

THE SIXTEENTH DAY

Radheya's fury was something terrible. The army of the Pandavas was not able to withstand the power of the arrows which were flowing in an unending stream. Not a single arrow was futile. Each claimed a life. It was not possible for the Pandavas to do anything about it. Still the army went towards him like a flock of moths against a flame. It was just like that. Radheya was burning like the sun. No one could find courage enough to fight with him. No one could even challenge him. It was midday. The fight was raging fiercely. There were several more duels fought. Yuyutsu fought with Uluka and was defeated.

Sakuni fought with Sutasoma, and the duel which Kripa fought with Dhrishtadyumna was worth watching. Kripa wanted to avenge the death of Drona, and Dhrishtadyumna knew it. He could not stand the fierce arrows of Kripa. He was overcome with fainting and he went away from the presence of Kripa. But Kripa followed him and kept on harassing him and the Pandava army. He was like Drona today. No one could stop him from destroying the army. Sikhandi was fighting a duel with Kritavarma. He did not fare well either. He was wounded and he too had to leave the presence of Kritavarma, admitting defeat. Kripa, Kritavarma and Radheya were bent on destroying the army.

Arjuna, of course, was excellent. The Kaurava army was like a huge pile of cotton caught in a gale. He was accosted by the Samsaptakas who were still left alive. Most of them were killed and the rest fled away in panic. Duryodhana fought with Yudhishthira. It was a very interesting duel. Duryodhana was a Maharathika and his heart was singing when he saw the enemy army being scorched up by Radheya and Kritavarma. Duryodhana was fighting well today. But Yudhishthira defeated him easily. The first four arrows killed the four horses of the king. The fifth killed his charioteer. The sixth tore away his banner and the seventh broke his bow. The army was watching this feat with amazed eyes. The eighth arrow tossed the sword of Duryodhana from his hand. The next five were enough to hurt him. The arrows followed each other so swiftly that Duryodhana had no time even to think. Seeing his condition, Radheya, Aswatthama and Kripa hurried to his assistance. Other warriors surrounded Yudhishthira and the fight became general.

It was well past midday. Bheema was almost like Arjuna: so fast was the rate at which the army was melting at his touch. Duryodhana fought again with Yudhishthira. He had not forgiven him for humiliating him earlier in the day. Yudhishthira was only too happy to oblige. The fight went on longer. Finally Yudhishthira threw a javelin at him and the king fainted because of a wound in the chest. Kritavarma came and took him away.

The war raged on till the end of the day. A large portion of the army on either side had been slaughtered. But nothing remarkable happened on the sixteenth day of the great war, the first day of the leadership of Radheya. The sun sloped his way towards the west. The fight went on long after that. The soldiers were scared that the fight might continue far into the night as it had happened once before. They all tried to leave the field even before they were asked to withdraw. The two armies were withdrawn. There was not much celebra-

tion on either side: nor was there much depression. It was again like the first day of the war when the noble Bheeshma was the commander.

CHAPTER 3

THE LAST NIGHT OF RADHEYA

Duryodhana must have been disappointed when he saw that Radheya did not kill Arjuna. He must have noticed too the duel which Radheya fought with Nakula. He must have seen that Nakula was not killed when Radheya could easily have done so. But the king did not speak a single word in criticism. He was so fond of Radheya that he had never once spoken harshly to him. He knew too that Radheya was just as disappointed at the fact that Arjuna was still alive. Just before they parted to go to their tents, Radheya wrung his hands together and said: "Arjuna fights well: he is skilful and he is very clever. He has a charioteer who can tell him what he should do, and it is the skill of Krishna that is keeping Arjuna alive. But tomorrow, I will do the needful. My lord, tomorrow I will achieve what I have sworn to achieve". His hands were grasped with affection by Duryodhana who said: "I know it, Radheya. I know it".

All the heroes had retired for the night. The thoughts of all of them hovered round Radheya. Radheya went to the tent of Duryodhana. It was late in the night. They were alone, discussing the plans for the morning. Radheya knew that he was the one man on whom Duryodhana was depending for his victory. They were together for a long time. In his heart Radheya knew that it was their last night together.

Radheya said: "Duryodhana, I want you to know the facts of the case. Arjuna and I are to meet tomorrow. Nothing will stop this meeting. Either I will win by killing him, or I will lose my life. I will not return to the camp without either of these things being decided. Now, my lord, I must tell you about the merits of both of us. I am superior, far superior to Arjuna. I do not want to brag about it as our worthy Kripa puts it, but I am stating the facts. Both of us have the divine astras at our command. But in grace and power I am far superior to Arjuna. I know it. I have a bow called Vijaya which was given to me by Bhargava. It is superior to Arjuna's Gandiva. This my bow was made by Viswakarma specially for Indra. It was given to my guru by Indra, and he gave it to me. I am superior to Arjuna

in that also. Tomorrow I will kill Arjuna and place the world at your dear feet. I will then have paid my debt of love to the most wonderful king.

"But now I will tell you why Arjuna is superior to me. His bow is divine and his quivers are inexhaustible. Arjuna's chariot is also divine. His horses are divine and his banner has the great Hanuman presiding over it. Krishna, the protector of the universe, is holding the reins of his horses. These three things make him the superior fighter. I am superior to Arjuna. But I have no good charioteer. If I have Salya as my charioteer, I am sure to win the war. Salya is like the great Krishna. Actually Salya is superior to Krishna. Even as I am in fighting, Salya is unequalled in the art of driving a chariot. Krishna knows the Aswahridaya but Salya is a pastmaster in the art. If only Salya agrees to be my charioteer, you can be sure of Arjuna being killed in tomorrow's battle. I am sure of it. But it is up to you to coax Salya. It is not going to be easy. But, Duryodhana, I depend on your gentle powers of persuasion. You can make anyone do anything for you. You have that gift, my lord!"

Radheya smiled a very sweet smile, and Duryodhana embraced him with affection. It was the last night they were to spend together. Duryodhana did not know it. But Radheya knew that he would meet his death tomorrow. He was ready for it. Duryodhana said: "I will do it, Radheya. I will coax Salya to do this for me. He will not refuse. Go and rest in peace. You have a difficult day ahead of you". Radheya lingered out of the tent. His heart was there. At the entrance of the tent he stood and looked back at Duryodhana. He was also looking at the retreating back of his beloved Radheya. Radheya rushed back and embraced Duryodhana once again. Duryodhana was touched by the affection of his friend. They shed tears together and then they parted. Radheya stumbled out of the tent.

Radheya lay down on his bed. He tried to sleep. But how could sleep come to his eyes which were burning like live coals? His heart was beating fast. He was to meet his death tomorrow. Fatalist that he was, still, he was finding it so difficult, so hard, to reconcile himself to the end. It was to be no ordinary fight. He had to fight with his dear brother and he must try his best to kill him. If everything were normal there was every chance of his killing Arjuna. Radheya smiled a bitter smile. How could he expect everything to be normal? Had anything about his life been normal so far? Now, at the end of it, why should it be normal? Krishna sat there holding the reins of Arjuna's white horses. Arjuna would win. It was known to Radheya. He knew too, that Salya would not be to him what Krishna was to Arjuna. There was a bond between them that was not present bet-

ween him and Salya. Actually Salya did not like him even. But that was all beside the point. He would fight as well as he could. He knew that in the end he would die, and so would Duryodhana. Yudhishthira would rule the world, and he did deserve it after all the many sufferings he had gone through.

Radheya thought of his two mothers. He thought of Radha, the mother who was so proud of him. He thought of Kunti. He thought of her sad sweet eyes and her gentle touch. He thought of the few moments he had spent with her, and he brushed away his tears. They were so futile. He was not able to banish all the many thoughts of the past which crowded in his mind and clamoured for attention. He saw again the insect which had hurt him in the thigh years back when he was in the ashrama of Bhargava. The scar was still there. The scar of the consequences was still in his mind too. His guru had said that he would forget the divine incantations when he needed them most. He would need it all tomorrow and he knew that he would forget it all tomorrow. There was no doubt about it. The curse of the brahmin said that his chariot wheel would get sunk in the mire and that he would be killed when he was not prepared for it. Yes, the dice was loaded very heavily against him. But he did not care. Radheya welcomed the thought of death. It would be so restful after the painful life he had to live all these years.

He would no longer be called upon to do those dreadful things like killing a child in cold blood: the child of his brother. He would not have to insult his brothers any more by touching them with the tip of his bow and see the tears of humiliation in their eyes. It was not easy for him to insult Nakula that day. It would have been easier to kill him. Yes, Nakula would feel proud that he had fought that duel with his brother and had been insulted by him. He smiled again. He would try and fight with Yudhishthira tomorrow and insult him too. Kunti must know that he had al the Pandavas at his mercy but did not kill any of them. He had given her that boon of his own accord and she must know that Radheya was a man who kept his promise. Krishna was keeping his promise. He knew that. It was hard for Radheya to meet the affection and compassion in the eyes of Krishna. Krishna was very fond of him. Krishna too, was very dear to Radheya. But for the affection he had for Duryodhana, he could have said that he was most fond of Krishna. Krishna knew it and was happy about it. He had shown that he was flattered by Radheya's affection for him.

The night passed slowly. But Radheya was awake all night. He was glad to have had time to take up each moment of his past life in

his hands and look at it before dropping it into the bowl of forgetfulness. So passed the last night of Radheya, a night haunted by the past.

CHAPTER 4

SALYA THE CHARIOTEER OF RADHEYA

The seventeenth day of the great war dawned. Early in the morning Duryodhana went to Salya and said: "I have come to you with a request. I now fall at your feet and ask you to grant it to me. I want you to do me a great favour. Today Radheya is to meet Arjuna in the battle. He can easily win if he has a charioteer like Krishna. I ask you most humbly to be the charioteer to my dearest friend Radheya. There is no one else who is good enough to hold the reins of Radheya's horses. You are the one person who can do it. You must see me through this crisis. Radheya is far superior to Arjuna. But, because of this handicap, he is not able to kill him. Look at my army now. It was so huge, and it has now dwindled down in size like a river during summer months. I had so many great heroes fighting for me. Most of them are dead: they died so that I may live. I do not know how I will escape the sin of killing so many of them. But all that is not a thing to worry us now. In this army only a few are left. You are the greatest of them all. You are the one person who can help me to win the war. Radheya is sure to kill Arjuna, with you as his charioteer. You are as much interested in my welfare as Radheya is. You must help me. Radheya is invincible even by the gods: why then should I worry about this mortal man, Arjuna? Please agree to my proposal".

Salya was wild with Duryodhana. He said: "Duryodhana, you are insulting me. You have no right to ask this of me. In your affection for Radheya, you are praising him too much. You are making him out to be greater than he really is. Your loving eyes are magnifying his greatness. You are trying to make me, a kshatriya, do the work of a sutaputra to a sutaputra. What has come over you, Duryodhana? Are you not trying to make me do the impossible? Sutas are just attendants at the court of a king. They are meant to hold the whip in their hands and drive the chariots of kings. I am a great king. I have been given the coronation bath. I wear a crown. I am a Maharathika. I have fought in many great battles and I have never been vanquished. Now you ask me to do menial service to an inferior: to a sutaputra. How can a kshatriya, who is an anointed king, be a

charioteer to a low-born man? You talk as though Radheya is superior to me. He is not equal to me. I can kill that man easily. You are trying to do this to me deliberately. Look at this bow of mine and look at these arrows. Look at my chariot and my beautiful horses. I can fight with Indra and defeat him in single combat. You have today insulted a great warrior. I can fight with Radheya and Arjuna and Krishna all together, and win. I am not pleased with you and your words. You have insulted me. I will go back to my kingdom. You do not deserve the affection I had for you". Salya tried to walk out of the assembly.

Duryodhana waylaid him and stood in front of him with folded palms and with tears in his eyes. He said: "My lord, it is not right that you should be angry with me. I have not tried to insult you: nor have I tried to make out that Radheya is better than you. I know all about you and your greatness. In a single fight Radheya will not be able to bear your fury. I know that you have been given the name SALYA since you are like a sharp arrow lodged in the heart of your enemy. I am trying to tell you the real reason for this request of mine. I know that Radheya is superior to Arjuna. But he must also have a charioteer who is superior to the charioteer of Arjuna. In this entire world you are the one person who is far superior to Krishna. Hence I am asking you to hold the reins of Radheya's horses as Brahma did for Sankara when he killed the Tripuras. Actually, my lord, you are twice as good as Krishna. You must do this for me and Radheya". Salya heard the words of Duryodhana. He said: "Duryodhana, you have today said in the midst of all these heroes that I am superior to Krishna. I am pleased with your remark. I will become the charioteer of Radheya. Since you consider me to be the only person to do so, I will do it. I promise to you in the presence of all these people that I will drive the chariot of Radheya". Duryodhana fell at his feet in gratitude and went to his dear Radheya to tell him about the good fortune that had befallen them.

Duryodhana came back to Salya and said: "I want to tell you something else. The great Bhargava obtained all the divine astras he had, from lord Sankara. The Lord had told him that the astras were not to be given to any low-born man. Bhargava agreed. He had Radheya as his disciple. He has given all the astras and his own bow called Vijaya to Radheya. He is a great man, my lord. He has the gift of inner sight. He must be knowing that Radheya is not a low-born suta. Radheya must have deserved his gifts: or else he would not have given them to him. For a long time I have felt that RADHEYA IS NOT A SUTAPUTRA. He is the son of a high-born kshatriya woman. He is the adopted son of Atiratha. I have no doubt about

his being the son of some god. He has got to be a kshatriya. He has been abandoned by his mother at birth: perhaps because of some indiscretion. This hero, glowing like the sun, cannot be a sutaputra. No deer can give birth to a leopard cub. Have you noticed his wide shoulders and his long beautiful arms? They cannot belong to a sutaputra who drives a cart! I know that he is a kshatriya born to some high-born woman and a god. His birth has the cloak of obscurity thrown over it. But his caste shines forth like the sun through the darkest cloud. Some day, this riddle will be solved and I will be the person to show the world that he is a kshatriya. Radheya is born to rule the world. You have got to see it. It is so obvious. My guess cannot be wrong. I know the greatness of Radheya. Else, how can he be superior to Arjuna the great archer? There is nothing shameful in being his charioteer. He is a kshatriya".

Salya embraced Duryodhana and said: "I am very fond of you and I will please you as best as I can. But I have something to say. I may use sharp words in my love for you. I may be sharp with Radheya. You and Radheya must not mind the sharpness of my tongue. I hate four qualities in man: insulting oneself because of inferiority complex: praising one's own qualities: decrying others: bravado. If I find any of these in Radheya I will censure him. He must not mind it". Radheya came in just in time to hear this. He said with a smiling face: "I am greatly honoured by your kindness. I am proud to feel that the great Salya is to be my charioteer. I thank you most humbly for this favour". Salya was very pleased by the humble words of Radheya.

Salya went and prepared the great chariot of Radheya. He brought it to the presence of Radheya. The chariot was Radheya's most precious possession. He made a pradakshina to it and saluted it. He saluted the sun, his father. He made Salya enter the chariot first and followed him into it. It was a splendid sight. Radheya and Salya were glowing like the sun and fire. They advanced towards the army of the Pandavas. He looked like the sun in his chariot driven by the glowing Aruna. Duryodhana was there. He spoke parting words to Radheya. He said: "What was not possible for Bheeshma and Drona will today be achieved by you, Radheya. I know that today is the most wonderful day in your life and mine. Go, my friend, and come back covered with eternal glory". Radheya said: "I will certainly try my best. I am taking leave of you. Remember that Radheya, your Radheya, spared no pains for your success. The rest is in the hands of Fate. You must always remember that, Duryodhana". The friends parted with just a wring of the hands. Radheya was moving away from Duryodhana. He had begun his last journey. The tears in his

eyes showed that he was conscious of it: that it was his last journey and that it was the last meeting with his friend Duryodhana.

CHAPTER 5

YUDHISHTHIRA HURT BY RADHEYA

Radheya said: "Salya, take me to the presence of the Pandavas. I am going to defeat all of them. I am sure to kill Arjuna and win the war". Salya remembered his promise to Yudhishthira. He had to damp the enthusiasm of Radheya as much as he could. He spoke words in praise of Arjuna and the Pandavas. He said: "Why do you have such a high ambition? How dare you insult the greatness of the Pandavas? You will talk like this until you hear the twang of the Gandiva. You will talk like this until you see Bheema destroying the elephant army. You will talk like this until you see Yudhishthira and his brothers with their sharp and stinging arrows. Then you will talk no more. I know the power of the Pandavas. You do not". Radheya said: "I do not want to displease you by contradicting you. Let us proceed, my lord".

The chariot was well on its way. Radheya was well versed in the art of reading meanings in the omens, and he saw that he was seeing omens unfavourable to him. He knew that nothing boded a pleasing future for him. He was past all caring. With a disdainful shrug of his shoulders he went on. His smile was tinged with bitterness. All the way to the front Salya continued his praise of the Pandavas. He praised Arjuna and he decried Radheya. It was wounding to Radheya. He said: "Your name fits you. Your words are terrible. They go right into my heart and hurt. They hurt abominably. I do not know why you are doing this to me. But I do not care. I will do my duty today. I know that there is such a thing as fate which watches over the lives of men. It is awake when all the world is asleep. It works in a strange manner. When I saw that Drona was killed and when I saw Bheeshma fall, I knew that man is powerless in the hands of fate. But the future of man is, to a certain extent, in his own hands. If death on the field is the ultimate fate of a man, still he can make a name for himself by fighting as well as he can. He can die in such a manner that he can make up for the wrongs of fate. I know that I have no chance against Arjuna. I have known it for the last so many years. I will fight for my king who has given me his heart and I

will please him by giving up my life for him. Please help me to perform this sacrifice for him. I am already a doomed man. Do not hurt the last few hours of my life with your words in praise of Arjuna. If your idea is to damp my enthusiasm, you are doing an excellent job of it. You have succeeded in your plan. Please do not speak any more". Salya was silent after this.

The army was arrayed wonderfully by Radheya. Yudhishthira and Arjuna arranged their army in a counter vyuha. Yudhishthira said: "Arjuna, you must meet Radheya today. Bheema will kill Duryodhana. Let us all meet them individually. Nakula will fight with the sons of Radheya, Sahadeva with Sakuni. Satanika will meet Dussasana, and Satyaki will meet his cousin Kritavarma. Dhrishtadyumna can take Aswatthama, and I will fight with Kripa". The fight began in a few moments.

The remnants of the Trigarta army rushed against Arjuna. As was his custom, Arjuna advanced single-handed. He had never taken an army with him. He had defeated the great Kalakeyas and the Nivatakavachas single-handed. He was able to work wonders all by himself. The noise made by the army was deafening. The clash of sword against sword, the whiz of the incessant arrows, the clash of mace against mace, the shrieks of horses and elephants as they fell down wounded, the beating of the war drums and the blaring of the trumpets: all these together made the battle-field a veritable home of noises.

Radheya was determined to fight his best today and die on the battle-field. He was like Bheeshma on the ninth day of the war. He killed each and everyone of those who came within the range of his arrows. The arrows were just singing past, all the time. It was not possible for anyone to meet him. Many of the Panchala heroes were killed even at the beginning of the battle. Radheya's chariot wheels were protected by his sons. Sushena and Satyasena were near the wheels and Vrishasena was protecting his father from behind. It was a formidable team. The Pandava host was trying its best to fight with Radheya. Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, the sons of Draupadi, Bheema, Sikhandi, Nakula and Sahadeva were all stationed against the chariot of Radheya. Not one of them could stop the progress of his chariot. Bheema was able to kill Satyasena, the son of Radheya. The other two were wounded. But Vrishasena came back in another chariot and continued to guard the chariot of his father from behind. The Pandava army was melting like snow at the touch of the sun. All the warriors were defeated. They had to abandon the presence of Radheya who was as terrible as the God of Death.

Yudhishthira advanced towards the chariot of Radheya. He was

bent on fighting a duel with him. With his eyes red with anger, the noble Yudhishthira said: "Listen to me, you low-born man. You are a sutaputra and for the last so many years you have been trying to vie with my Arjuna. You have sworn to kill him. You have been fond of the king Duryodhana who is a low man though born of a high and noble family. Let me see your prowess. I want to see this valour of yours, depending on which my cousin has begun this war. Come, fight with me and show me how powerful you are. I will save Arjuna the bother of killing you". Radheya smiled and said: "So be it". He looked at Yudhishthira for a long time. He roused himself from the reverie and said: "Yudhishthira, you are a great man. You are a great fighter too. I am happy to greet you as one hero does another. I am happy to have been given a chance to meet you and spend some time with you. You may not believe it, but I am pleased to be with you for a while". He smiled his sweetest smile and began to fight with Yudhishthira.

It was a great duel. Radheya was hurt in the beginning by the arrows of his brother. He sat down on the terrace of his chariot unable to bear the pain. He fainted away. He roused himself and continued to fight. Satyaki and the others came to help Yudhishthira, but Radheya was unmoved. He routed all of them and was left fighting with Yudhishthira. Again there was a repetition of the technique of Radheya. Yudhishthira's bow was broken. With a smile Radheya broke open the glowing armour of Yudhishthira, who now stood without his bow and without his armour. His body was covered by his blood. Radheya could not bear to see the blood of his younger brother. He hated himself for it. But it had to be done. The smile was still on his lips. He saw a javelin thrown by Yudhishthira. With a low laugh he broke it into two. Four more of them were broken too. Yudhishthira's banner was on the ground. Radheya had reduced him to the state of a helpless man who could be killed at a moment's notice. Yudhishthira glared with helpless fury at Radheya. Radheya laughed at him and his discomfiture. He touched Yudhishthira with the tip of his bow and said: "Yudhishthira, you are born in a great family. You are the eldest Pandava. You are a kshatriya and my poor self is just a sutaputra, as you aptly put it! You, a kshatriya, are supposed to be good at killing your enemies. But, my lord, your honoured self is not fitted for the role you have taken up. You are a brahmin by temperament. You are wrong as a kshatriya. Please do not attempt to fight with those who are your superiors. Do not challenge anyone unless you are sure of defeating him. Go back to your home, my dear Yudhishthira: or go where your brother Arjuna is fighting. You can never kill Radheya in single combat." Radheya turned away from

Yudhishthira and left his presence. As if to punish himself, he began to attack the army with renewed vigour. Bheema and the others tried to defend the army from the fury of Radheya. They could not.

Radheya went to another part of the field. Bheema followed him there. He was wild with anger against Radheya. He had hurled such insults at Yudhishthira. Looking at Bheema who was advancing, Salya said: "Radheya, look at Bheema. He is angry with you. His face has never been so angry before. I have seen him after the death of Abhimanyu and that of his son Ghatotkacha. Even then he was not as angry as he is now. Today he looks like the God of Death. I wonder why". Radheya said: "You are right. Bheema is angry. He is angry for his brother whom I have insulted just now. Do you not know that to the Pandavas the eldest brother is a god? The *eldest Pandava* can command the love and devotion of all the other Pandavas. They are prepared to die for him. I will fight with Bheema". Bheema advanced towards Radheya. They fought for a long time. In his fury, Bheema was able to make Radheya faint. He wanted to cut the tongue of Radheya for the words he spoke to his brother. Salya was displeased with Bheema. He said: "Bheema, do not be rash. Stop this. This is a wrong thing you are trying to do. Your brother was insulted by Radheya and you have therefore fought with him and you have defeated him. That is enough. You can go back from here. As for killing him, it is Arjuna's work. He has sworn that he will kill Radheya, and it is he who must try and see if he can keep his promise. You can go away from here". Bheema thought that the words of Salya were true. He left the presence of Radheya and went away. After recovering from his faint, Radheya wanted to fight again with Bheema. The king saw what he wanted to do, and sent some of his brothers to help Radheya. Bheema gave all his attention to them first. He killed so many of them. He had now lost count of the number of his victims. Radheya and the others advanced towards Bheema, and the other heroes on the side of the Pandavas joined Bheema. The fight became general once again.

The Trigartas had always been causing a lot of trouble to Arjuna throughout the war. Whenever he wanted to fight with someone important, the Samsaptakas would challenge him and harass him for hours together. It was the same today. Arjuna could not move away from them without destroying most of their army. He would kill some of them, and the next day some more of them would spring up from nowhere and challenge him. He had today been greatly harassed by Susarma who was one of the few who had not been killed yet. He was good at using the divine astras, and Arjuna had to fight for a long time with the Trigartas and he destroyed more than half their army. He looked

in other directions. He saw Radheya. Arjuna had been watching him. He saw that Radheya had now fought with each one of the heroes on their side and had defeated each one of them. He mentally applauded the prowess of Radheya. He spoke to Krishna about it. He wanted to be taken to the presence of Radheya.

Aswatthama came to the presence of Arjuna. He wanted to fight a duel with Arjuna. Arjuna had to agree. They began their duel. In a short time Aswatthama covered the chariot of Arjuna with his arrows. Nothing could be seen of Arjuna or his chariot or the charioteer. Krishna was very angry with Arjuna. He said: "Still you have not got over your affection for your guru or his son. All that I have taught you so far has been just wasted. The foolish love you have for these two men is more than all my words. Your hands lose their quickness. Your fingers become numb when you see these men. Your Gandiva is asked to take some rest evidently, and you like to be harassed by Aswatthama. I am displeased with you and your soft fighting at the wrong time. You have always been like this when your opponent is one of these. You forget your duty at the critical moment". Arjuna could not bear the taunting words of Krishna. He fought with real anger. He removed the cloak of arrows which had covered them both. He fought furiously. He used several divine astras and was able to defeat Aswatthama. The horses of Aswatthama bolted, carrying him away from the battle-field.

Chapter 6

IN YUDHISHTHIRA'S TENT

Arjuna turned his attention to the other heroes on the side of Duryodhana. The king of Magadha and his brother were the next to fight with him. They were Dandadhara and Danda. He killed them both. He fought with the Samsaptakas once again. Krishna asked Arjuna to hurry towards the chariot of Radheya. He had to be killed that day. Arjuna was in time to watch a fight between Aswatthama and the king of the Pandyas. The Pandya king was very proud of his prowess. He did not like to be compared to anyone since he thought himself to be far superior to all the others. He was. He fought with Aswatthama and was killed by him. It was a great loss to the Pandavas. Arjuna saw that a great portion of his army had been destroyed by Radheya. Aswatthama was trying to kill his dear enemy Dhrishta-

dyumna in a duel. Arjuna joined in the general fight, and he was like a new lease of life for the depressed fighters. The enemy army was routed and the Pandavas advanced further towards the army of Duryodhana. Krishna saw the chariot of Radheya moving about the field as fast as the wind. Radheya was dancing on the field: so graceful was his progress. Krishna watched him and said: "It is a pleasure to watch Radheya. Look at the graceful manner in which he draws the bow and shoots the arrows. His chest is indeed broad and beautiful. Look at the battle-field. It is strewn with bodies of soldiers and every one of them is wearing an arrow marked 'Radheya'. It is time you and he met. He has come to the end of his days on the earth. This great man has to die at your hands, Arjuna. Let us hurry. Let us try and meet him as soon as we can".

The several duels that were fought were all indefinite in their results. In some cases the Pandavas were fortunate and in others the Kauravas. Radheya and Yudhishthira met again in single combat. Radheya was able to defeat him and wound him. It was so terrible that Yudhishthira could not even stand up. He went to his tent and lay down on his bed, unable to stand the pain caused by the arrows of Radheya. He had been hurt by his words already. Yudhishthira was very depressed. Everyday he was getting more and more dissatisfied with the way things were progressing. He did not want this war at all. But now that the war was being fought, he did not like this drawn-out agony. He wished that Arjuna would fight more intensely than he was doing so far. No, he was not pleased with the way Arjuna was fighting. Arjuna had said that he would kill all the enemies single-handed. He had done nothing about it so far. He was killing the ordinary soldiers as his grandfather was doing. But he had done nothing about the killing of Radheya who was the main source of danger. He was allowing Radheya to dance about the field and was doing nothing about keeping up his oath: that he would kill Radheya. Radheya had today said that Yudhishthira was fit to be a brahmin and not a kshatriya. But Yudhishthira was feeling that the description fitted Arjuna better now. He was so soft in his fighting that it looked as though he did not want to fight at all. Only Bheema was hearty about the whole thing. Nakula and Sahadeva were doing their best. But it came to this: the army on either side was dwindling. Nothing was being done about the killing of the main actors. Dhrishtadyumna was the one person who had stuck to his oath, and Arjuna was angry with him for that. Thoughts like these were crowding in the mind of Yudhishthira.

Arjuna was proceeding towards Radheya who was becoming a terror to his army. Arjuna missed Yudhishthira there. He heard from Bheema that he had gone to his tent because of the wounds inflicted

by Radheya. At once Arjuna said: "Krishna, I must see my brother at once. After I have comforted him I will come and kill Radheya" He asked Bheema to stay and ward off the enemy attack, and went to the tent where Yudhishthira was resting.

Krishna and Arjuna entered the tent. They saw Yudhishthira there, alone and in the depths of depression. He saw Krishna and Arjuna come towards him. He got up from his bed and welcomed them. When he saw them coming to him in the middle of the fight, Yudhishthira thought that Radheya had been killed and that they had come to give him the happy news. He said: "After all he has been killed. Radheya has been haunting my sleep for the last so many years. He has been killed and I am so happy. Tell me, Arjuna, how did you fight with him? How did his death happen and with what astra did you kill him? Tell me everything in detail". Arjuna said: "My lord, I have not been able to meet him yet. I have been prevented by several of the Kaurava heroes from this encounter with Radheya. Having defeated the terrible Samsaptakas, I was going towards Radheya. Bheema was holding the brothers of the king at bay and I did not see you there. I was told that you have been wounded and that you are resting. I became concerned about you and your welfare. So, here I am. I am going now to kill Radheya. Please bless me and send me". Yudhishthira was greatly disappointed at the news that Radheya was still alive. He lost his temper. He swore at Arjuna. He used very harsh words. He insulted Arjuna by saying: "Give me the Gandiva which is just an ornament in your hand. I will go and kill Radheya". Arjuna was furious. Krishna intervened and said: "Arjuna, can you not see that Yudhishthira has been wounded by Radheya and the suffering has made him impatient? He wants to rouse you into action. That is the reason why he is so harsh in his language". Yudhishthira had now cooled down and he spoke gently to Arjuna. He embraced Arjuna and Krishna and said: "I send you forth with my blessings. I know that you will come back victorious". There was hope in his voice. He felt that the death of Radheya was imminent.

Krishna and Arjuna had their horses refreshed, and set out again to the front. The two were talking together as they proceeded. Krishna said: "Arjuna, you have sworn that you will kill Radheya. You can do it. But remember, he is not an easy opponent. He is the greatest archer on this earth. Even as you did during the days of the Rajasuya of Yudhishthira, Radheya has also defeated all the kings of Bharatavarsha. He has defeated the king of Kasi single-handed when he won a bride for the king. He has defeated Jarasandha whom I could not face. Radheya is your equal: in fact, he is your better. He is glowing like Agni. He is like Vayu in his speed. He is like Indra in his anger.

This handsome Radheya is a very proud and sensitive man. He is the most powerful person on the side of Duryodhana. He is devoted to Duryodhana. Radheya is a good man. He has performed innumerable good actions and he is famed as the greatest giver in this world. Arjuna, you will have the good fortune of killing the great Radheya". Arjuna said: "Krishna, I have you with me. You are leading me to victory. All I have to do is to listen to you. I will kill Radheya with your blessings". They went towards the Kaurava army and joined in the general fight.

Bheema had been busy with the destruction of the army. Everyone fled at his coming. He was like the wild north wind when it sweeps across the earth in fury. He was terrible. He wanted to kill as many of the brothers of Duryodhana as he possibly could. He looked for them in that army as a gleaner looks for stray grains of corn in a field which had been mowed down by a sickle. He was careering on the field, uttering shouts like a hungry lion. He heard the twang of the Gandiva in the midst of his celebration. He knew that Yudhishthira was well. Now the two of them, Arjuna and himself, could work havoc in the army. Nakula was there, and Sahadeva. He enjoyed the company of Arjuna while fighting. Arjuna was coming straight towards Bheema. He had been worried about him since he had been caught in the thick of the enemy army when he last saw him. Duryodhana sent Sakuni to fight with Bheema. He was sent back defeated. Radheya came to the rescue of his army. At a touch, the entire face of the front changed. No one could fight Radheya. Today he was like the burning of a thousand torches at the same time. He was like someone divine. Bheema and the rest of them were not able to bear his arrows tipped with liquid fire.

Chapter 7

THE DEATH OF DUSSASANA

Arjuna asked Krishna to take him to Radheya. He said: "Krishna, Salya is holding the reins of his horses even as you are holding those of mine. He looks splendid with the reins in his hands. Radheya is magnificent. I have got to meet Radheya. Take me to him soon". "So be it", said Krishna and set his horses in Radheya's path.

Salya saw the chariot of Arjuna coming towards them with grim determination. It is to be noticed here that Salya had stopped taunting

Radheya. He was overcome with sheer admiration for this great man who had set his life at stake and was fighting for his king Duryodhana. His promise to Yudhishthira was forgotten. He saw the greatness of Radheya, and the warrior in him admired Radheya. He said: "Radheya, the time has come when you shall fulfil your oath that you will kill Arjuna. He is cutting up the army and it looks like so much straw caught in a sickle. He is heading straight for you. Radheya, you are the one person in the world who can face Arjuna. I know of no one else who is as great as you. You will stop this man as the land does the rushing tide. He has no protectors. You are able to kill Arjuna and Krishna. I know it. Bheeshma, Drona, Kripa and Aswatthama are far inferior to you in prowess. I am very proud to be the charioteer to such a great hero. Our army has scattered in all the four directions on seeing Arjuna. Radheya, you have so much power in your arms. You are well versed in the art of fighting. I remember that you won this earth for your friend Duryodhana once. You can do it again now by killing Arjuna".

Radheya's eyes were blind with tears of gratitude for the words spoken by Salya. He said: "My lord, you have today made me the happiest person on this earth by your words of praise. I feel greatly honoured. I will try and live up to your expectations. I know the greatness of Arjuna. Still, I am hoping to kill him today and please my lord, master and friend, take me to him. I cannot wait".

The two chariots were proceeding towards each other. Duryodhana was all the time watching Radheya. He wanted to help him. He sent some of his brothers and others to help Radheya. The progress of the two chariots was again impeded by a general fight. Bheema had again come to the forefront and it was hard to stop his advance. Satyaki had killed Sushena, another son of Radheya. Radheya killed the son of Dhrishtadyumna, and now the Panchalas were attacking him all together. Sikhandi, Janamejaya, Yudhamanyu, Uttamaujas, and Dhrishtadyumna were the five warriors who were fighting with Radheya. He was able to defeat all of them. He made them retreat. They were joined by Satyaki and other Panchala warriors. The fight became general once again, to the great exasperation of Radheya and Arjuna. They were impatient to meet and they could not.

During the general fight Duryodhana with several of his brothers came to join in the fight. Dussasana was in the front. Bheema and Dussasana met. They fought a terrible duel. Each covered the other with arrows. Dussasana was a powerful fighter and he hated Bheema. These two factors made him fight his best today. He withstood the onslaught of Bheema. Bheema said: "Come, Dussasana, I have been waiting for this duel for the last so many years". Dussasana smiled at

him arrogantly and said: "I have always wanted to see you fight. I am just as happy about this duel as you are, Bheema". Bheema said: "I am glad you came to me today. I can today clear a debt I owed you for a very long time. I remember the time when you touched the perfumed hair of my Draupadi with your sinful hands. Ever since then, my dear cousin, I have always been thinking of you and only you. You might have forgotten it. But I have not". Dussasana sneered at him. In an insolent voice he said: "Why should I forget? I remember it very well. I remember so many other things when you speak of Draupadi. I remember your running away from the house of lac to save your lives. I am remembering the time you spent in the forest like animals. I seem to remember your taking for wife a monster called Hidimbi. I remember the city of the Panchalas where Arjuna won that woman for wife. I remember that all of you wanted her, and she agreed to play wife to more than one man, even as your mother did. I remember her as she stood in our court: a slave, thanks to our uncle Sakuni". They were fighting all the time. The fight was very fierce. Dussasana was an excellent archer and the javelin which was thrown at him by Bheema was broken into two by the arrows of Dussasana. He was annoying Bheema by breaking his bow. Bheema was furious. He took up his mace and with one fell blow he killed the horses of Dussasana. He made Dussasana fall down from his chariot by a powerful blow from his mace. Dussasana was on the ground. Bheema looked at everyone around him and scanned them all one by one. He looked terrible as he stood there rolling his eyes. They were copper-red with anger. No one spoke: no one breathed.

Bheema looked at Duryodhana standing near and said: "Yes, it is when you are looking on, that I should do it". He looked at all of them: Kripa, Aswatthama, Radheya and Duryodhana. He laughed a cruel laugh. Bheema rushed towards the unfortunate Dussasana and caught him in his hands. He caught him by the neck as a lion catches an elephant. He said: "Dussasana, so you remember everything! Then how is it you do not remember the one thing which you ought to have remembered? I am going to drink the blood from your heart. Let me see who is able to stop me and save you". Bheema turned to the people around him and said: "Duryodhana, eighteen days back you sent me a message through this jackal by name Uluka. You said: 'Bheema, you swore that you would drink the blood of Dussasana. Drink it if you can! You may be able to carve meat for eating. But let me see how well you are going to carve my brother's heart!' This was the message you sent me. I am giving the reply now. Watch me carve the heart of your brother! See me drink his blood. You were told that you will see your brother's helpless eyes and that you will be

able to do nothing about it. Look, Duryodhana, I have your brother by his neck now. Look at him like a sparrow in the grip of a hawk. You can see his eyes. They are asking you all to save him. Come and try, if you can!"

It was the most terrible sight. No one could move. Everyone was paralysed. Bheema threw Dussasana on the bare ground. He placed his foot on his neck. He cut the right arm of Dussasana from his body and threw it on the ground. He said: "Now the oath of Draupadi is fulfilled. She wanted to see this jewelled hand to fall on the ground: the hand which had dared to touch her hair". Bheema ripped open the chest of Dussasana. He cut it with a swift stroke of his sword. Blood spurted out and Bheema put his lips to the wound as the blood rushed out warm from the form of the dying man. Dussasana was not dead yet. It was terrible to see Bheema drinking human blood and saying: "This is the most tasty of all the drinks I have tasted so far". With the blood ebbed out the life of Dussasana.

Radheya could not bear to see this dreadful scene. He could do nothing to help his friend. Salya saw the grief of Radheya. He said: "You are too sensitive, Radheya. War means all these things. Now that Dussasana is dead, the king has only you to help him. Do not lose heart at the sight of this outrage. Duryodhana is plunged in grief. The fate and happiness of the king is all in your hands. Do not lose heart. Let us proceed to the spot where Arjuna is. I am taking you away from here". Salya took the chariot of Radheya away from the presence of Bheema.

Vrishasena, the son of Radheya, was advancing towards the army of the Pandavas. He went straight at Bheema. He was indeed the son of Radheya. He had the same grace and power for which Radheya was famed the world over. He was harassing the Pandavas. Arjuna saw this. He came to fight with Vrishasena. Arjuna had sworn that he would kill the son of Radheya when he was looking on. After fighting with him for a while, Arjuna killed Vrishasena with a sharp arrow. Radheya had to see his son killed. He had just seen the killing of Dussasana. Before he could get over the shock of it he had to see the death of his child. His eyes were full of tears which flowed like an endless stream. Anger gave place to sorrow. Radheya was eager to fight with Arjuna. He asked Salya to proceed fast towards Arjuna.

CHAPTER 8

RADHEYA AND ARJUNA

Radheya's chariot had come to the front. He stood just in front of Arjuna. The two great fighters, the greatest archers in the world, faced each other, bent on killing each other. Radheya challenged Arjuna to a single combat.

Just before the fight began, Radheya turned his smiling face to Salya and said: "I am hoping to win today. If, however, I am killed, what will you do, my lord?" Salya's eyes were moist. He said: "I am sure you will win. If, however, you should die, Radheya, I will kill the two of them and avenge your death". Radheya was very happy to hear the words of Salya. Strange to say, Arjuna asked the same question of Krishna. Krishna smiled and said: "The sun may drop down from the heavens, but you will not fail. The fire may lose its heat, but you will not fail. If, however, you are killed by Radheya, then you may be sure that the end of the world has come. I will kill Salya and Radheya with my bare hands. I will destroy the world with my anger. But that will not happen. I know it". The two charioteers glared at each other and the two fighters smiled at each other. They were ready for the fight.

Aswatthama saw them preparing themselves for the fight. His heart was suddenly full of compassion for everyone on the battle-field. He took the hand of Duryodhana and squeezed it. The king was still heaving with the sobs caused by the death of his beloved brother Dussasana. Aswatthama said: "Duryodhana, look at these two heroes getting ready to kill each other. Stop this war. Make peace with the Pandavas. They are good men. My father is dead. Bheeshma has fallen. In a short while Radheya may be dead. I will ask Arjuna to stop it. He will listen to my words. Krishna will welcome the suggestion of peace. I cannot be killed, and my uncle cannot be killed. Still, you may lose the war. Yudhishthira has always hated the thoughts of war. Bheema, Nakula and Sahadeva will listen to their brother. This slaughter has gone on long enough. Stop it. Let Radheya and Arjuna live as friends. I ask you very humbly to make all hostilities cease. If you do not, I can assure you, you will be plunged in grief. Make them all your friends. Nothing will be more wonderful. Save your soul before it is too late. You know that I am not as fond of anyone else as I am of you. I want you to live, my dear friend. That is why I am asking you to do this. I am sure that Radheya

will be killed in today's fight. I want to spare you that grief. That is why I am asking you to stop this war. Look at the destruction caused to both the armies during these seventeen days. You must ponder well and stop this war".

Duryodhana looked at his friend and stood silent for a few moments. Then he said: "All that you are saying is true, Aswatthama. I know it only too well. But it is too late. After seeing my beloved Dussasana killed like that, I cannot think of anything else but war. We have gone too far: there is no return for us. It is no use thinking of the impossible. Things have been destined to follow a certain pattern. It will all happen just that way. Radheya is right. There is no armour against fate. I must go on. I cannot stop. I thank you, my friend, for your affection. But it cannot be done. This war must go on to the last man". Duryodhana made arrangements for an army to surround Radheya. Arjuna had the entire Pandava army around him. They all wanted to watch while the great duel was being fought between the two great heroes of Bharatavarsha.

The duel had begun. Radheya and Arjuna were fighting with just ordinary arrows and javelins and the like. They had not warmed up yet. It was just the beginning stage of a duel. It was more a display of the skill of both. The arrows of Arjuna were cut up by Radheya when they were in the act reaching him. The same skill was displayed by Arjuna also.

The tone of the duel changed in a moment. Arjuna suddenly decided to use divine astras. He sent Agneyastra. Radheya braced himself up and smilingly sent the Varunastra, the counter astra. The fire caused by Arjuna's astra was quenched by that of the proud Radheya. The sky was now covered by dense black clouds, and a cool breeze blew. The clouds were dispelled by the Vayavyastra sent by Arjuna. Still, it was just display. There was darkness one moment because of the Varunastra, and it was dispelled by Arjuna. Now Arjuna sent the astra called Aindra. It began to shower arrows on the entire army of the Kauravas. Radheya was furious with Arjuna. He took up an arrow and spoke the incantations for a great astra. It was the powerful Bhargavastra, the gift of his guru Bhargava. This astra was terrible. It destroyed all the arrows sent by Arjuna. The entire army was amazed at the greatness of Radheya. The army on both the sides suffered as a result of these astras. The Bhargavastra was more powerful than the Aindra. The Pandava army was being harassed by it. The Kauravas were happy. Bheema was very angry with Arjuna. He said: "Radheya is covering you with his arrows. The enemies are laughing at your condition, and you are doing nothing about it. If you cannot, just tell me and I will kill Radheya with just one hit of

my mace. His time is ripe. He will have to die and I will do your work for you". Krishna heard the words of Bheema and said: "Arjuna, it looks as though the words of Bheema are true. It looks as though we will never be able to emerge out of the veil of arrows which Radheya has placed around us. Arjuna, why do you hesitate?"

Krishna spoke to Arjuna as Narayana to Nara. He said: "Did you not kill Dambodbhava when he challenged you? Radheya is Dambodbhava. You must use all your astras against this man who is a pastmaster in the art of fighting. Send the Brahmastra. You must remember who you are. You must remember the purpose for which you have been born on this earth. Rouse your sleeping self and do the needful". Arjuna remembered his previous birth. He invoked the Brahmastra after saluting it in his mind. The four quarters were covered by the arrows from this astra. Arjuna and Krishna emerged out of the cloud that had been covering them up till now. Radheya was sending a stream of arrows. It looked as though he did not need any astra to cause a continuous stream. Arjuna was not able to bear the power of the arrows of Radheya. But he managed to recover himself. He had covered the chariot of Radheya with his arrows. For a while the Kauravas thought that Radheya had been killed. There was loud lamentation. But Radheya came out of it easily. The two heroes were equally matched. They sent against each other all the astras they knew. Yudhishthira heard that the great duel was being fought between Arjuna and Radheya. With difficulty he got up and came there to watch the duel.

The sky was filled up with all the devas who had come to watch the fight. Indra and Surya were very nearly on the point of fighting a duel on behalf of their sons. Bheema was also being hurt by the occasional arrows of Radheya. The entire army on either side was suffering from the arrows of both of them. Both the bows, Vijaya and Gandiva, were making music. There was no other noise there on the field except the twanging of the strings of these bows. There were often shouts and cheers, now from the Kauravas and now from the Pandavas, when something graceful was performed by either of the two.

Radheya cut the string of Arjuna's bow. Arjuna replaced it with great speed. With a smile Radheya cut that also. Again it was replaced. This happened eleven times. Arjuna was replacing the strings so quickly and so skilfully that Radheya was lost in admiration. He praised Arjuna in his mind. He was proud of this younger brother of his. He loved him so much when he fought so well. Radheya was covered again by the arrows of Arjuna. Looking as angry as Rudra at the end of the world, Radheya began to harass Arjuna. He had with him five deadly snake-like arrows. These he sent towards Krishna. Arjuna was

furious. The anger of both was rising. The time had passed when they could afford to be gentle. It was a fight to death between them now.

CHAPTER 9

THE DEATH OF RADHEYA

Arjuna sent arrows which burned Radheya. The arrows were aimed at the army which surrounded Radheya. The protectors of the wheel of Radheya's chariot fled in sheer terror. Arjuna continued to halt all those who surrounded Radheya. They all fled away, leaving him alone on the field. Duryodhana was very angry with these deserters. He tried his best to make them go back to the front. But no one was able to face Arjuna and his terrible arrows. Radheya cut away his arrows which were trying to cover him up. He now decided to send a single astra which was sure to kill Arjuna.

Radheya took up the terrible Nagastra. It was now his most precious possession. For a moment he thought of the Sakti which has been with him all these years. If only he had not been forced to part with it! He could have killed Arjuna: and now it had gone back to Indra. Radheya had no time to think. He had no time for regret, no time to think of the might-have-beens. He had nothing except the Nagastra. He was sure of its killing Arjuna. He took it out of his perfumed case and took sure aim at the neck of Arjuna. He planned to cut his head. Salya saw this and said: "Radheya, do not aim at his neck. Aim at his chest: or at least send another arrow, a companion, aimed at his chest. This may fail". Radheya said: "Radheya will never change the aim once it has been taken. It is not befitting a good archer to send a companion arrow thinking that the first will fail. It is against the etiquette of fighting to change the aim after one has decided". Radheya drew the string to the fullest. He fixed the arrow to it. The sky glowed with the brilliance of the astra. Radheya said "Arjuna, take a good look at the world before you die. This is your last moment on the earth." The astra had left his bow. It coursed along the air like a streak of lightning, spitting fire as it approached Arjuna. The army was watching with bated breath. The Pandavas were sure of the death of Arjuna.

Then happened something which baffled the plans of Radheya. Krishna pressed hard on the horses. They knelt down on the ground making the chariot sink into the ground to a depth of five inches. Since

the chariot had been pushed far into the ground, the astra could not touch the neck of Arjuna. It hit against the beautiful crown he was wearing and felled it to the ground. It was the crown which had been placed on his head by Indra. It had been made specially for him by the divine craftsman, and it was fretted with a thousand gems. It was the crown which had earned for him the name Kiriti. It fell down on the ground hit by the Nagastra.

A great sigh, which seemed to shatter his frame, escaped Radheya. He knew now that he had nothing that would hurt Arjuna. This was the one thing that should have killed him. It had failed because of the astuteness of Krishna. It was all over: his dream of killing Arjuna and Duryodhana's dream of ruling the world. It was all just a mirage. Tears of anger and disappointment blinded Radheya. He brushed them away impatiently and began to fight as before. Arjuna bound up his beautiful curly hair with a white kerchief and resumed fighting. Yudhishthira was still gasping with relief. It was a close thing. He had almost lost Arjuna. But Krishna was there: Krishna who had said that the Pandavas meant his very life to him.

Radheya saw a vicious snake emerging from the spot where the crown had fallen. The snake came to Radheya and said: "Your astra failed to cut the neck of Arjuna since I had entered it without your knowledge. Now look at me and send the astra again at him. I will certainly kill him. Arjuna is an old enemy of mine. My name is Aswasena. During the burning of the Khandava forest my mother was killed by him, and I have been nursing this grievance against him all these years. Please send me again. You are the one man who is capable of killing Arjuna. Let me help you in your attempt. Help me to take my revenge on Arjuna". Radheya was very angry with the snake. He said: "Listen to me, you interfering fool! Radheya is not so helpless that he has to get the help of others to fight with his enemy. I depend on myself and on no one else. I would rather be killed a hundred times than depend on the strength of others. I will kill Arjuna with my strength and not with borrowed strength. You have done me wrong by entering without my permission. You can go away from here before I kill you". Aswasena was wild because his attempts at revenge had come to nothing. He decided to attack Arjuna all by himself. The snake sped across the air with the intention of killing Arjuna. Krishna saw the snake coming in the direction of the chariot. Guessing its intentions, he said: "Arjuna! Quick! Kill this snake before it kills you. It is coming to kill you". Arjuna said: "Who is this that comes to destroy me without being sent by anyone?" Krishna told him about its ancient hatred for Arjuna. Arjuna sent six sharp arrows which killed the snake even as it was poised in the air ready to strike. The fight went on

between Arjuna and Radheya. Both were cut up by the many arrows, and blood was flowing in rivulets along their mighty chests. Salya and Krishna were hurt too. But the fight went on.

Radheya's end was drawing near. Fate had decided that the moment had come. Unseen by anyone and unknown to anyone, Fate was trying to make the curse of the brahmin come true. The earth had to co-operate, and she became soft all on a sudden. One wheel of the chariot of Radheya was slowly but surely getting caught up in the mire. It looked like the sun setting: like life ebbing out of a spent body. It was a slow process but it was very sure. The wheel had sunk far into the ground. The chariot tipped and the level was uneven. It was then that Radheya noticed it. He went back several years. He saw the dead cow on the ground. He saw the brahmin and his angry eyes. Again he heard the voice of the brahmin: "When you are fighting with your enemy, your heart's dearest enemy, the wheel of your chariot will get sunk in the ground. And, just as you killed my poor innocent cow when it was unaware of the danger that threatened it, even so will you be killed by your opponent when you are least prepared for the attack".

Radheya wanted to make the most of the time given him. He fixed an arrow to his bow-string and invoked the Brahmastra. He could not remember the great astra. It was now the end. His guru's words came back to him: "When you are desperately in need of an astra, your memory will fail you." Radheya saw that he was now completely beaten. His wheel had sunk to the ground: the divine astras were not at his command any more: the Nagastra had proved futile. His Kavacha and Kundalas had already been lost: his Sakti had gone. Tears of rage filled his eyes: rage against fate.

Arjuna was cutting the strings of his bow as quickly as he strung them. Radheya wrung his hands in helpless fury and said: "It has been said that righteousness is always there to protect those that are righteous. As far as I am concerned, I have practised Dharma to the best of my knowledge. But this Dharma is a wayward mistress who never rewards those who love her. There is nothing like Dharma in this world". Radheya was being hurt by the sharp arrows of Arjuna. But he had become quite indifferent to all these things. Arjuna sent the great Aindrastra against him. With very great effort of the will, Radheya remembered the Brahmastra and sent it to baffle the Aindra. His chariot had its left wheel completely sunk in the ground. The protectors of the wheels had been scared away long ago by the fury of Arjuna. Radheya had to descend from the chariot. Arjuna fixed an arrow to his bow-string and he had planned to invoke the great Rudrastra. Radheya's eyes filled with tears of wrath and helplessness.

He said: "Arjuna, the left wheel of my chariot has sunk into the ground. It is just my fate and nothing else which has caused this to happen at this critical moment. If you will wait a moment, I will raise it. You are a great hero. You are a righteous fighter. Please stop your fighting until I am ready. It is not fair to fight when the opponent is not ready to fight back. I am sure you will follow the rules of fair fighting. You are there on the chariot and I am here on the ground without weapons. It is not right that you should send your astra now. Wait for a while. I will raise the wheel and we will then fight".

Krishna laughed cruelly at Radheya. He said: "So you want a fair treatment from Arjuna now! Tell me truly, Radheya, if you have walked always in the path of righteousness. You have been part of Duryodhana's plots against the Pandavas. You were there when their queen Draupadi was dragged to the court by Dussasana. You gloated over her helplessness more than the others. You never thought of righteousness when the game of dice was being played. Why talk of what happened long ago? Let me remind you of something which happened but four days back: yes, four days back. All of you killed Abhimanyu". Krishna's eyes were red. His face was terrible to look at. It was distorted with fury and sorrow at the thought of Abhimanyu. He said: "Yes. Abhimanyu. Six heroes murdered him. He wanted a fair chance. He did not have a single weapon. With the wheel of his chariot in his hand he called you all to fight with him one by one. Did you think of the rules of fighting then? Who cut the bow of Abhimanyu from behind, when he was unaware of it? Was it a hero who knew the rules of fair fighting? You disgust me with your demands for fair fighting. How dare you expect it when you did not pay any attention to it then?" Krishna's lips were throbbing with rage.

Krishna's words hurt Radheya more than the arrows of Arjuna. He knew it all to be true. He hung his head down and went on with his attempts to lift the chariot from the ground. It was almost like his attempts to live against all odds. Krishna knew all about him. He knew that the one wrong act he did in his life was loving the sinful Duryodhana. But he was paying the price for it with his heart's blood. Was that not enough? Why should Krishna wound him like that? It was all destined long ago that he had to be the only true friend of Duryodhana. Fate had decided his future and it was no use trying to explain one's actions. He loved this man Duryodhana. He was prepared to do anything for him. He committed sin for his sake. He had never approved of the shady plans of Sakuni. He had even tried to prevent Duryodhana from taking the advice of Sakuni. But it was of no use. Radheya never did have the heart to deny Duryodhana the happiness of his triumph over the Pandavas. Radheya had

been so hearty in the sabha on that memorable day since he wanted to please Duryodhana. Krishna knew it and yet he accused him of unrighteousness. But now there was no time to think. He could not unweave the web that had been woven once. He had been caught in it. It was now time to die: to lay down the arms and rest. He had paid the debt in full. Radheya left the wheel of the chariot and went back to fight.

Arjuna did not send the Rudrastra. He sent the Agneya and it was baffled by Radheya sending the Varunastra. Radheya's body was weak with the effort he had to expend in remembering the incantations. That was the last astra he could recall. He had to depend now on just his own skill to ward off the astras of Arjuna. Arjuna was now sending the Vayavyastra. In between the exchange of arrows, Radheya would jump down from his chariot and try to lift it up. Again he would resume the fighting. It was a sight that should have made the gods weep. It was awful to see the great Radheya in such a terrible condition. No one could help him. No one could come near him because of the arrows of Arjuna. And again, everyone was too stunned by the horror of the situation to do anything. Salya could do nothing. He had to manage the horses which were ready to bolt at any moment: their bodies had been mangled so ruthlessly by Arjuna.

Radheya sent a powerful arrow to kill Arjuna. The impact was just terrible. It fell on Arjuna's chest and he fainted. The Pandavas thought that he was dead. The Gandiva slipped from his hand. It was a great moment for the Kauravas. They were sure that Arjuna was killed. But before they could cheer Arjuna recovered from the faint. His eyes took on a crimson hue. He felled the banner of Radheya. The glittering banner fell on the ground looking like a fallen rainbow. With the fall of that banner fell all that was dear to Radheya: his fame, his name. The heart of the Kauravas broke when they saw the proud banner of Radheya lying on the ground, drenched in the blood of Radheya. He tried once again to lift up his chariot. He could not. He gave up all hopes now. But still he was trying. He was on the ground with his two arms straining at the wheel. His veins were like whipcords. His face was wet with sweat and blood pouring down his temples. His eyes were raining tears of mortification.

Krishna said: "Arjuna, you must hurry. You must kill Radheya before he comes back to the chariot". Arjuna took up an arrow which was like a thunderbolt. Looking at it, the Kauravas lost heart. Arjuna invoked the divine astra and fixing the arrow to his bow he pulled the string to his ears. He released the arrow. The sky was illuminated by the splendid arrow as it sped on its way. Radheya was bending down: his arms were still trying in vain to lift up the chariot. The

arrow of Arjuna came very near him. Radheya just looked at it and, even as he was looking at it with a smile of sheer contempt in his eyes, it cut the head of the great Radheya. The head of the great commander of the Kaurava army fell on the ground like the sun suddenly descending to the earth. His handsome face still bore the smile and his lower lip was caught between his teeth in his efforts to raise the chariot. A glow left the body of Radheya and went upwards to the sky. There were some who could see this. The glow went slowly, so slowly that it looked as though it were unwilling to leave that beautiful body which had held it for so many years.

Chapter 10

THE KING—A PICTURE OF WOE

Radheya was dead. There was nothing left on the earth after the death of Radheya. All that was beautiful and noble died with Radheya. It was the afternoon of the seventeenth day of the great war. But looking at the fallen form of Radheya everyone was sure that the sun had left the sky and descended to the earth to make it beautiful. The field looked beautiful because of the noble head of Radheya which was lying on the ground like a broken lotus blossom. There was a sudden darkness in the sky for a few moments. The sun, sunk in sorrow, stopped glowing in the sky for a few moments. He came out again but his rays were weak as at the end of day.

Radheya was glowing like molten gold. His broad chest, which had been hurt by the arrows of Arjuna, looked wonderful to those who stood and looked at him. His lotus eyes were closed. His body was covered with the dust of the battle-field. The sun looked on him and he was stricken with despair. Slowly and very unwillingly he illuminated the battle-field. It was midday. But the sun's rays were as soft as moonbeams: so great was his sorrow at the death of his unfortunate son.

Salya drove the chariot without its banner and without its owner, to the camp. He found that the dreadful chariot had come out of the mire of its own accord. It looked as though nothing had happened to it. Salya was not able to see because of the tears that welled up in his eyes. His ears were deafened by the roars in the Pandava army. He could not bear to hear the sound of conchs and trumpets which were blaring forth the victory of the Pandavas. Salya hurried to the presence of Duryodhana.

The king was a picture of woe. His heart just broke when he saw the fall of the greatest of all men. He did not dream that Radheya, his dear Radheya, would die that day. He remembered the night before when Radheya came to him again from the doorway of the tent and embraced him. He wept hot tears that scorched him like drops of liquid fire. Radheya was dead and he was alive. He had not grasped the full truth. Slowly he realised that he was alive in a world which had no place for Radheya. His Radheya was dead. Dead. He beat his hands in futile fury. He was speechless with woe. Salya found him thus, with his eyes raining tears and his words coming out in gasps. He could not stand up. His knees gave way under him. Seeing Salya, his grief broke out anew. He saw the chariot of Radheya and the empty seat. He saw the bow and quiver of Radheya. Duryodhana broke down completely.

Salya comforted him. His heart was heavy when he spoke to Duryodhana. He said: "My child, do not break your heart. These things are all in the hands of fate. Having seen how Radheya fought, I can only blame fate for killing him. There was never a duel like the one fought today. Radheya was more than a match for Krishna and Arjuna. But Fate was too powerful. It was Fate which killed Radheya: Arjuna was just the instrument. There is no use in trying to stop the course of Destiny". Salya spoke in glowing terms of the valour of Radheya. He said: "He has now reached the heavens. Do not grieve for Radheya. He is happy now. Recall the army. It is not in a condition to fight. They have all become numb with the shock of the fall of Radheya. Even the sun shines but dimly today though it is not evening yet. Stop the war for the day". Duryodhana left it all to the others and sat sunk in woe. Aswatthama and the others came to Duryodhana and tried to pacify him. But nothing could soothe the wounded heart of Duryodhana. He sat where he was, all through the terrible night.

Radheya was alone on the battle-field. He was dead, but beauty had not left his noble face. His body was glowing as though there was still life in it. People were still afraid to approach him. He looked as though he were just resting. The magnificent figure of Radheya was lifeless. The fire in him had been quenched. Radheya had been on the field for just seven days. Within these seven days he had achieved so much. This noble man, who had never refused anyone anything, was now dead. He had given away all he had. He was the favourite of the king. Depending on Radheya, Duryodhana had begun the war: and Radheya was dead. The rivers stopped flowing when Radheya died. The sun lost his glory when Radheya died. The earth quaked in fear and the sky was red with agony. The planets were all displaced

because of this great calamity. Comets were seen even during the day. There was a cry of pain even from the gods who had assembled in the sky, pain from those who were immune to pain. Such a great fall was the fall of Radheya.

Arjuna blew his Devadatta and Krishna his Panchajanya. It was evident that they did not blow it as lustily as they usually did. Krishna did not. Yudhishthira had gone back to his tent during the middle of the duel since he could not stay for long. He was still suffering from pain from his wounds. The two friends hurried towards the tent of Yudhishthira. Arjuna jumped out of his chariot and ran to his brother. Yudhishthira was waiting for him eagerly. He had already heard about the death of Radheya. Arjuna fell at his feet, the beloved feet of his honoured guru and brother. Yudhishthira lifted him up and embraced him. He embraced Krishna who stood by. All the heroes were waiting to congratulate Arjuna on this his greatest achievement. Arjuna was very happy. Krishna said: "Yudhishthira, today is a happy day for you. With the death of Radheya the hope of Duryodhana is dead. Your anger, which was born fourteen years ago, is now burning bright and it is burning up the Kauravas. You are already the lord of the world". Yudhishthira said: "You are our hope, Krishna. You have done this for me. You are here to protect us, the Pandavas. Where is the need for worry?"

Yudhishthira was today rid of the worry which had been robbing him of his sleep. He was so happy that Radheya was dead. He wanted to see him dead. He called for Arjuna's chariot and, followed by his friends, proceeded to the battle-field to see the dead form of Radheya with his own eyes. He saw the three sons of Radheya lying on the field. He saw Radheya sleeping peacefully after the fitful fever called life. Yudhishthira looked for long at the beautiful form of Radheya and returned to his tent. He heaved a sigh of relief. He spoke nothing for a long time.

The sun sloped gratefully towards the western hill. It was a day fraught with the greatest misfortune for him. It was the day when his beloved son had been killed in the battle. The sun was grateful for the few hours of respite. He needed all his strength to appear again in the east next morning to usher in another day of pain.

Chapter 11

WITH HIS GRANDFATHER

Duryodhana did not want to think of anything. He thought of the day of the tournament. That was when he first saw Radheya. He wanted to see him now. In the dead of the night, when the entire camp was sleeping, Duryodhana hurried to the battle-field. He saw Radheya. He sat by the side of his friend who had loved him so much. He had died for him. He just sat there looking at the handsome face of Radheya. He thought he would go mad. He rushed from there. He ran across the entire field. He ran to his grandfather who was waiting for his death. He fell at the feet of the old man and sobbed as if his heart would break. Bheeshma placed his old, tired hands on the head of this unfortunate grandson of his. He said: "My child, the death of Radheya had to happen. You must not grieve so much for his death. He is happy now. He was a kshatriya and he died as a kshatriya should". Duryodhana was startled. He said: "So I am right. Radheya was a kshatriya. Grandfather, I have all along felt that Radheya was a kshatriya. Now you are saying the same thing. Tell me who he was. I am eager to know it. I will remove the stigma from his name at least now. I will do at least this for my friend who died for me. Tell me, grandfather".

Bheeshma said: "I know who he is. But I cannot tell you unless you promise me that you will not tell anyone about it. It was the wish of Radheya that no one should know about it. He made me promise that I would not tell you about him until he died. Now that Radheya is dead I can tell you, but you must keep it a secret until you die". Duryodhana was puzzled. He said: "If my beloved Radheya desired it to be a secret, I will certainly respect his wishes. I will not tell anyone about it. Tell me". Bheeshma pondered for a moment. He said: "Duryodhana, you are already suffering from a shock. Can you bear to hear this?" Duryodhana smiled a bitter smile. He said: "After seeing the dead form of my Radheya, I am still alive. Does it not prove that my heart is made of stone? I can bear anything now. Tell me, grandfather, tell me: Who is Radheya?"

Bheeshma paused for a moment. He said: "I will tell you. Strengthen yourself to hear the truth. Your friend was not RADHEYA. He was KAUNTEYA". Like the shock of sudden pain, the truth hit Duryodhana in the face. He reeled under the shock. He held on to the hands of his grandfather and said: "What! Kaunteya! Are the

Pandavas the brothers of Radheya? Tell me everything, grandfather" Bheeshma told him all the painful details of the life of Radheya. He told him about the coming of the sun to Kunti and about the box of wood. He told him about Atiratha finding the box and about the name RADHEYA: how he decided on that name to be his for life. Bheeshma told Duryodhana how Radheya realised that he was not the son of Atiratha. His heartbreak when Drona refused to take him as his pupil as he was a sutaputra. Then the painful episode in the ashrama of Bhargava. Then about the tournament when his love for Duryodhana was born. Bheeshma told his grandson how the two loves were the only things that mattered to Radheya: love for Radha his mother and love for Duryodhana. He told him about the Kavacha and Kundalas being given away by Radheya, because he loved a good name more than his life. Duryodhana was then told about the visits of Krishna and Kunti. He heard all about the infinite love Radheya had for him.

Bheeshma told him everything. Duryodhana sat silent. His tears were drenching the hand of his grandfather which he was holding in his two hands. Then he spoke in a voice choked with pain: "Radheya KNEW and yet he would not go to them because he loved me so! God, why am I not dead? Why does the earth stay without swallowing me up? Radheya, my friend, I will come to you soon: as soon as I can. I cannot live without you". Bheeshma tried to talk to this child who was now distraught with grief. Duryodhana braced himself up and said: "Now nothing can hurt me. My mind is cleansed of all sin when I have heard about the noblest man that ever lived. I can meet death with a smile on my lips. I have learnt it from him. I am free of the love for the kingdom. I want to share it with Radheya. I am now past all caring. I want one thing: DEATH. I will die as a kshatriya should. You will be proud of me, grandfather. I must go now and make preparations for my death". Duryodhana walked away without turning back.

SALYA
PARVA

CHAPTER 1

KRIPA AND THE KING

It was the next day. Early in the morning Kripa went to the king to see if he had slept well in the night. Looking at the bloodshot eyes of the king, he knew that he had not slept a wink. He took Duryodhana's hand in his and squeezed it in silent sympathy. He was sorry to see his condition. He looked at him and said: "Duryodhana, do not grieve so much. I am so sorry for you. You know that Aswatthama and I are very fond of you. We want you to live. The kshatriya code of honour is a destructive code of honour. It believes that killing is the ultimate aim of man. It is not right. The duty of a king is to protect the lives of his subjects and not cause their death. Please listen to me. You began this war with hope singing high in your heart. But your hopes have not been realised. The great Bheeshma has been vanquished. Drona, who we thought was invincible, is dead. Radheya, that lone star in the later horizon, has now set. I saw Jayadratha killed. So many of your brothers are dead. Your son Lakshana Kumara is dead. What is there for you to fight for? I am sure that your love for the kingdom died yesterday when you lost Radheya. All those who were dear to you are gone. We are literally just a handful of us left out of this carnage. We have seen the end of those who were near and dear to us and still we are alive. All these days we have fought and we have realised that it is not possible to conquer Arjuna. He has been victorious: always. Look at the state of your army now and think of it just eighteen days back. Arjuna has killed so many of our heroes. Bheema and Satyaki with Dhrishtadyumna and Abhimanyu have caused havoc in our army.

"When Dussasana was killed we were all there. You were in the presence of Bheema. Radheya was there and Kritavarma was there. I was there. Yet Bheema killed him. We could do nothing about it. Even in the same manner, Jayadratha was killed. Can you not see that we have absolutely no chance of winning? The wise say that one should fight when one is powerful and that peace is more sensible when one is weak. Do not think that I am suing for peace because I am fond of my life. In the interest of you, my king, and the few remaining men, I am saying this. More than anything else, it is my desire to see you live that is making me ask this favour of you. Make peace with the Pandavas. Yudhishthira will be only too glad to make it up with you. Krishna is for peace too. The Pandavas will listen to the

words of Krishna. Please, Duryodhana, stop this destruction". Kripa was sobbing with emotion. He fainted after saying these words. He loved Duryodhana and he wanted to see him live. Duryodhana saw the condition of his dear acharya. He revived him with perfumed water. Kripa regained his senses and still he was shedding tears.

Duryodhana looked at him with eyes soft with emotion, with tears and with affection. He said: "You are speaking the right words. Only a friend will talk like this to me. You are my well-wisher. Before the war you tried to dissuade me from thoughts of war. But once the war began I have not had a more sincere fighter than you. You were always at the van and you would enter the Pandava army without thinking of yourself and the risk to yourself. I know it, my lord. You are my first guru. Drona came later. I have been with you ever since I was born. You have taught me much. I have immense respect for you. Your words are full of affection and compassion for me. I know it so well.

"But, my lord, it is not possible to make peace now. It should have been done long ago. Think of the many sufferings of the Pandavas. Think of the game of dice. Do you think I will be forgiven that? Krishna came to me with a message of peace. Remember how I treated that? Do you remember the scene in the court when Draupadi was dragged to the court by Dussasana? Bheema is known to me. We played together. He has always been an affectionate person. Did you see him when he drank the blood of my brother? What rage must have been fuming in his heart for years for him to have done what he did. Think of Abhimanyu! Do you think Krishna and Arjuna will ever forget the death of Abhimanyu? Never! The insult to Draupadi will never be forgotten by the Pandavas. Draupadi has taken an oath that she will sleep only on the ground until I am dead. My dear acharya, you do not seem to see things in their proper perspective. Peace is not possible: not with the great Pandavas who have been so harassed by me. The death of Abhimanyu has made it impossible even to dream of peace. Let us not think of that.

"Apart from all this, I am not for peace. *I do not want* to make it up with the Pandavas. As you say, Yudhishthira is so righteous that he will agree to the proposal if it is made by me. Krishna and Arjuna may also forget Abhimanyu. It is quite probable that they will agree for peace. They are all of them peace-loving men and I know that the moment I suggest it they will agree. But, acharya, I am not for it. I do not want to make it up with the Pandavas. No. I have enjoyed this entire world all alone. Do you think I will now share it with them? Yudhishthira and his brothers will rule the world and I will have to be a dependant on them. I have always blazed in

lone splendour, eclipsing the lesser kings of the world. Can I follow in the train of this man Yudhishthira as one of his attendants? I have tasted luxury. I have given away so much wealth as charity. How can I become a lesser king subordinate to the Pandavas? My lord, having known me and my pride, you must not suggest this peace with the enemies. I am not angry with you: not at all. You mean well. But I am yet to see a sick man relish bitter medicine.

"I am set on war. I feel that it is the wisest path to glory. I am not a coward. I have never feared anyone or anything. I have lived a full and happy life. I have lived like a king. I have pleased the poor with my bounty. I have heard the Vedas being recited night and day. I have performed Yajnas too. I have placed my foot on the heads of my enemies. My servants have all been treated well by me. I have always helped those who were in want. I have made my conquests and I have ruled my kingdom well. After tasting all this, I am not able to imagine me as a dependant. Now, my friends are all dead. I have lost all the men who wanted to see me monarch still. They all died as kshatriyas should.

"In this world, where everything dies, where is the comparison between a life of comfort under another man's rule, and eternal fame? Radheya's favourite theory was that a man should strive for fame and for nothing else since fame is the one thing permanent, unchanging, in this transcient world. I want fame. I can get it only by fighting. My name will be cleansed of all its stigma if I die bravely in the war. It is not a good death for a kshatriya if he dies at home suffering from a disease or fever. A kshatriya should die either in the battle or in the forest.

"I have made up my mind. I will reach the heavens after fighting bravely. All my dear friends have gone there already. They will be waiting for me. They gave up their lives for me and this is the only way in which I can repay the debt. The path has been trodden by my grandfather and my revered guru Drona. The dearest of men, Radheya, is gone. Jayadratha, who trusted me, has gone there already. I will attain the highest regions by dying on the field. My mind has lost the glamour it had for the kingdom. I do not care for it: not after the death of Radheya. I wanted to share this world with him. I wanted to sit on the same throne with him. But that could not be. He is gone. I will not play the coward now when they are all gone. The world will think of me as a time-server. The world will talk of me in disparaging terms if I make peace with the Pandavas after allowing all my friends to die for me. I am guilty of many things but not ingratitude. I have really decided to make up for all I have lost. I mean to find a way to heaven, and that is by a brave death

on the field of battle. Do not grieve for me. I am past all caring. With the death of Radheya something inside me snapped. He was the noblest of men. He gave up his everything for me. I cannot live in this world after he is gone. I am lost without him. The only way to join that noble man is to die: die fighting and not by dying at home with my bed surrounded by weeping relatives. Please try to understand me and my refusal to take your advice". Duryodhana was silent after this. Kripa thought that the greatness of Radheya and the loss of him had made Duryodhana suddenly soft, gentle and very lovable. He could say nothing more. They had to think of the war, and the next commander had to be chosen.

CHAPTER 2

DEATH OF SALYA

Most of them had just finished their morning ablutions in the red waters of the river Saraswati and were waiting for the king to go to them and talk about the future. Their bodies were burning as if with fever and the waters of the river could not cool them. Duryodhana went to the banks of the river and met them. He went to Aswatthama and asked him for his opinion. He said: "You are the wisest of all of us. Please tell me who should be made the commander of the army". Aswatthama said: "The great Salya is the fittest person to be the commander. He is the most powerful man and he is very devoted to you. It is possible to win the war with Salya as your commander". Duryodhana approached Salya and said: "With folded palms I stand before you asking you to be the commander of our army. Please lead us to victory". Salya was very happy. He said: "I am very happy to do this for you. Yesterday, just before the duel between Radheya and Arjuna began, Radheya asked me what I would do if he should die in the war. I told him that it was not possible. But if he should die, I said, I would then avenge his death by killing Arjuna and Krishna. I have to keep up my promise to one of the greatest of men that I have met. I will be the commander of your army. I am a very powerful enemy. The Pandavas will not be able to withstand my prowess. Arjuna cannot defy me. I will today win the war for you, Duryodhana, or I will die on the battle-field. You can rest assured that I will do my best". Salya was crowned the commander of the Kaurava army. There was a semblance of happiness in the minds of all of them.

Listening to the sounds coming from the Kaurava camp and drawing his own conclusions, Yudhishthira said: "I can see that Salya has been made the commander of their army. I do not know what is to be done now. Salya is a great man. He has never been defeated so far. How are we going to tackle him?" Krishna said: "I know. What you say is true. No one has been able to defeat Salya. His skill with the bow and arrow is something wonderful. He is a very graceful fighter. Bheeshma, Drona and Radheya are all far inferior to Salya. In fighting with the mace he is unrivalled. He is terrible with the mace. Even our Bheema will be defeated by him. Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, Arjuna, Bheema, Sikhandi and the twins: all of these together cannot equal Salya. But, Yudhishthira, I have a feeling that you are the one person who is superior to Salya. Excepting you, no one will be able to kill him. Please forget the fact that he is your uncle. You must kill him as Indra killed Vritra. You are a righteous man. You have the power of Dharma behind you. You will be able to kill Salya, the commander of the Kaurava army".

The eighteenth day of the great war had dawned. The army of the Kauravas was today commanded by Salya. He was skilled in forming vyuhas. He arranged his scanty army in a difficult vyuha. He had with him just a few of the heroes: Kripa, Aswatthama, Sakuni, Kritavarma, Duryodhana and a few of his brothers. They made a pact. There should be no individual duels. They could not afford it. They should attack the Pandava army all together. It should be a wholesale slaughter. Each should protect the other and they should avoid duels as far as possible.

The fight began. Even though they had suffered greatly during the last seventeen days, the two armies were still huge. It looked as though the plan of Salya was very good. Seeing that Salya had planned a combined attack, the Pandavas divided their army into three divisions headed by Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi and Satyaki. Yudhishthira attacked Salya. He was supported by Nakula and Sahadeva. Kritavarma's attack was defended by Arjuna. Bheema was against the acharya Kripa. The fighting was intense. This combined attack was causing quick destruction in the armies. The Kaurava army was suffering greater loss. Salya was concentrating on Yudhishthira. It was almost a duel that was fought between Salya and Yudhishthira. Salya was faring well. Yudhishthira was finding him to be too powerful. Bheema came to his help. He brought out his mace to fight with Salya. He felled the horses of Salya with one blow of his mace. Salya jumped down from his chariot and took up his mace. There was a magnificent duel between the two. Everyone, Duryodhana and the others, stood watching the duel between the great fighters. Finally Salya was overpowered by

Bheema. He fainted away and was carried away from the field by Kripa. The fight became general once again.

The war on the eighteenth day was singularly wanting in the spectacular duels of the other days. All of them were eager to finish the war soon. It was a wholesale slaughter. Salya came back in another chariot and resumed fighting with the Pandavas. He had begun to kill ruthlessly. It was midday. The army was suffering from the fury of Salya's arrows. He was magnificent. The Kauravas were sure that they would win the war. Duryodhana was quite sure that the Pandavas would be killed. Satyaki and his friend Dhrishtadyumna were, however, just as terrible. Bheema was in his element. There was no one who could stand up against Arjuna. Still, the Pandavas were suffering. Yudhishthira was getting worried. He told himself: "Even the words of Krishna seem to go wrong. He said that I will be able to kill Salya. Satyaki, Dhrishtadyumna and all my brothers are trying in vain to stop him. Krishna's words cannot go wrong. I must kill Salya". He was furious with his uncle for his cruel killing of the army. He called everyone of his associates and said: "The Kauravas have now been reduced to just a handful of heroes. Bheeshma and Drona with the terrible Radheya and so many other heroes have been killed. We have victory almost in our grasp. I must not let it slip because of Salya. You have all done your share in the war. Arjuna has killed so many. Satyaki has killed so many. Bheema has destroyed most of the army. Dhrishtadyumna has rid the world of Drona. It is now my share. I must kill Salya. I have decided either to die myself or kill him. Satyaki, you must become the protector of the right wheel of my chariot. Dhrishtadyumna, the left wheel will be protected by you. I am asking Bheema to precede me, and Arjuna will protect me from behind. Equip my chariot with all the weapons in abundance. I will now set out to fight with Salya". After this, Yudhishthira felt as though he had already killed Salya.

The fight was on. With his lips set in grim determination, Yudhishthira fought with Salya. Yudhishthira fought very well. The teachings of Drona were not forgotten by him in spite of the thirteen years of exile. All the Kaurava heroes rallied to the help of Salya, and all the heroes on the side of the Pandavas were stationed about the chariot of Yudhishthira. It was a new Yudhishthira they saw today. He was looking like the God of Death: so formidable was the frown on his forehead. Salya was without his chariot once and without his bow more than once. He fainted once and came back to fight after he had recovered. The prowess of Bheema on the eighteenth day was something they had not seen before. He harassed Salya in a thousand ways. He killed his horses and his charioteer with his mace. Salya was undaunted.

Yudhishthira was set on killing him. Salya advanced towards Yudhishthira as a lion jumps at a weaker animal. Yudhishthira set his thoughts on Krishna and he took up a terrible javelin. It was very strong and wicked-looking. It was fretted with gems and it looked like the Sakti in the hands of Lord Kartikeya. Yudhishthira threw it at the chest of Salya. It was a terrible weapon. It coursed through the air like a star aflame. It hit Salya in his broad chest: hitting it, the javelin entered his chest as a snake enters its hole in the ground. Salya's blood flowed out in spurts. The great Salya, the commander of the Kaurava army, fell down dead. His body fell out of the chariot and on the ground. His arms were both spread out and he looked as though he was taking a final embrace of mother earth before he was parted from her.

Chapter 3

SAKUNI DEAD

There was panic in the Kaurava army at the sight of the fallen commander. But the fight had to go on. Duryodhana himself advanced in the van of the army. Seeing him, the army felt that new life had been infused into it. He addressed them all in his powerful voice: "Why should you all try to run away? Death, the arch enemy will conquer you anyway: whether you are a coward or whether you are brave. Is it not better then, to fight and die? You can be sure of reaching heaven where all our heroes have gone now. Why are you afraid of the Pandavas? Let us fight, all of us, and leave the rest to fate". The king was in the van of the army. Looking at him and his noble bearing even when he was on the point of losing the war, the army rallied round the serpent banner and resumed fighting. Duryodhana fought wonderfully. Alone, he was keeping at bay the entire army of the Pandavas. Satyaki, Dhrishtadyumna, Bheema, Arjuna, Yudhishthira, Nakula and Sahadeva were all powerless against the terrible arrows which were flowing out of the bow of the king. Sakuni was a worthy companion to Duryodhana. He had his son Uluka with him and they were fighting their best. Seeing their brother in the van, the remaining brothers of the king came to his help. Bheema advanced to the front and attacked all of them. They were like deer at bay. They fought furiously but Bheema was able to kill all of them except one: Sudarsana. Event followed event in quick

succession. Arjuna was busy fighting with the remnants of the army of the Trigartas. Susarma, his ancient enemy, was finaliy killed by Arjuna. With his death the Trigarta chapter was closed.

Sakuni saw the king in the midst of his cavalry. Duryodhana had his one remaining brother with him. Bheema approached the part of the field where Duryodhana was standing. He crossed the elephant army and he was accompanied by Arjuna and the others. Bheema attacked Sudarsana. Duryodhana fought as one inspired. With a sharp arrow Bheema cut off the head of Sudarsana. All the sons of Dhritarashtra had been killed by Bheema, except Duryodhana.

Sakuni intervened with his elephant army and made the fight general. His son Uluka was with him. Sahadeva and Nakula fought with them both. Uluka was killed by Nakula. His oath was fulfilled. It was terrible for Sakuni to see his son dead. He fought for a while and then tried to run away. Sahadeva pursued him and said: "Why are you trying to run away? If it had not been for you, this war would never have happened. If only you had not entered Hastinapura, Duryodhana would never have lost his princely nature and become a cheat. You were so happy when you played the game of dice with my brother. I swore that I would kill you. You laughed at all of us when we took our oaths. But now, under your very eyes, all our oaths have been fulfilled. Arjuna has killed Radheya as he had sworn to do. Only Duryodhana is still alive. It will be a matter of moments before he is killed. Your son Uluka has been killed according to the promise of Nakula. It only needs your death to make us all true to our oaths. Come and fight with me". Sakuni had to fight. He fought well too. But Sahadeva threw a javelin at him and killed him. With the death of Sakuni, all Duryodhana's hopes were killed too. He knew that it was all over. The curtain had fallen on the last act of the tragic drama. It only needed an epilogue and he would himself provide it.

The fight went on. Of the eleven Akshauhinis there were now two hundred chariots, five hundred horses, a hundred elephants and three thousand soldiers. They fought so valiantly with the Pandavas. A few more moments, and they were all destroyed. Of the eleven Akshauhinis, not a single soldier was alive. All were dead. The Kaurava army was now made up of Duryodhana, Kripa, Aswatthama and Kritavarma. Just these four were left. The remnants of the Pandava army was: two hundred chariots, seven hundred elephants, one thousand horses and some footmen. That was all that was left of the seven Akshauhinis which they had at their command eighteen days back.

Chapter 4

DWAIPAYANA LAKE

Duryodhana saw the vast expanse of the field of Kurukshetra. He remembered the words of his uncle Vidura: "You will be the cause of the destruction of the entire race of kshatriyas". Duryodhana's senses were reeling. He did not know what was happening to him. He thought: "Vidura must have seen all this with his mind's eye". Duryodhana was seated on a horse and it was wandering aimlessly. It had been hurt by many arrows. Suddenly the horse dropped down dead. Shedding tears for the one and only companion of his, who had also died because of him. Duryodhana abandoned the dead horse and walked away from there. He thought of himself eighteen days back and his heart was heavy with grief: not so much for himself as for those who had died for him. His mind went at once to Radheya. How he must have suffered! He had done so much for him, and he had to die. He must have passed through immense agony when he realised that the Pandavas were his brothers. Radheya! The one and only Radheya! Duryodhana's frame was burning as though a rain of fire was pouring all over him. He wanted to get away as far as possible from that dreadful battle-field. He walked on and on. He came across a cool and placid lake. It was so inviting. He thought he would cool his limbs in the cold water. He had nothing in his hand except the mace which was his eternal companion. He was standing there, alone with his sorrow.

Sanjaya, the charioteer of the king, saw him there. He saw him with his eyes full of tears. Duryodhana looked the image of pain and anguish and heart-break. Sanjaya's heart was ready to break with compassion for this monarch who was now alone, without hope, without a single man with him, without any desire even to talk. He hurried to the presence of the king. Duryodhana looked at him with tear-filled eyes and was not able to recognize him. His eyes were with his heart and that was far away. Sanjaya said: "My lord, I am Sanjaya, the charioteer of the King". Duryodhana shook himself out of his reverie and said: "Sanjaya, happily, you have escaped from the fury of the Pandavas". He embraced him warmly and held his hand. Sanjaya smiled at him and said: "I was in the camp as was my custom. Having destroyed the entire army, the Pandavas came to the camp to see if you were there. They found me. Satyaki found me and took me as a captive. Dhrishtadyumna saw me. He laughed at Satyaki for his capture and said: "What is the use of capturing this man?

Whether he is alive or dead is immaterial to us". Satyaki said: "Right then. I will kill him". He had raised his sword to kill me. Vyaasa came there and said: "This man must not be killed. He must be allowed to go back to the king Dhritarashtra". So they released me and here I am. But, my lord, what is the matter with you? Why do you look like this? I feel that your mind has gone out of your control". Sanjaya wept like a woman, looking at Duryodhana who had once been the monarch of the world. Duryodhana smiled gently. He pacified Sanjaya and said: "Sanjaya, I wish my mind could become unhinged. I can then be spared the agony of thinking back. I am very unhappy. I cannot find words to say how unhappy I am. You are the only person here who loves me and my father too. I have no one even to weep for me except you."

Duryodhana stood silent for a few moments. Then he said: "Sanjaya, I want you to go to my father and tell him: 'Your son, Duryodhana, has entered the depths of the lake. His frame was burning him and he is hoping to cool the burning in his limbs and in his heart by staying inside the pool for a while. What is the use of living after all his brothers and friends are dead and after the war has ended in favour of the Pandavas?' Sanjaya, tell my father that I have no more any desire to live. Please convey to him my salutations. I will not see him again. I ask him for forgiveness for the great grief I have caused him. He has always loved me. He will forgive me. Tell my mother Gandhari that I am not fit to be the son of such a great soul. Tell her that this Duryodhana, who has never bent his head down to anyone, falls at her feet and begs forgiveness of her. Tell her that my only prayer is to have her as my mother in my next birth and in all the births to come. Go now, Sanjaya, I must cool my limbs for a while and rest inside the water. I must enter the lake before I am seen by anyone". Duryodhana entered the lake with his mace in his hand. He knew the art of making the water stand still. He knew how to stay inside the water for a long time. He stayed inside the lake called Dwaipayana. Sanjaya went away from there after seeing the king disappear inside the lake.

On the way Sanjaya met Aswatthama and Kripa with Kritavarma. They said: "It is fortunate that you are alive, Sanjaya. Did you see the king anywhere? We do not know if he is alive or dead. Can you tell us?" Sanjaya told them about Duryodhana entering the lake. Aswatthama was very unhappy to hear this. He said: "What a pity! He does not know that three of us are still alive. We may still be able to defeat the Pandavas". They saw the Pandavas looking all over for the King and they went away from there.

There was great excitement in the Pandava camp. They had won

the war. In eighteen days all the Kaurava heroes had been killed and the war was over. Yudhishthira was lord of the world. It took them some time to realize that Duryodhana was nowhere to be seen. They looked for him everywhere. He could not be found. They sent spies to all the four quarters to bring them news of the king who had escaped with the mace in his hand. His dead horse was found, and after that they could not find any trace of Duryodhana. It was the most unexpected event: this flight of Duryodhana. They did not think that he was a coward. They looked for him all over the neighbourhood of Kurukshetra. Evening was just drawing near. They had to go back to their camp without achieving their purpose.

When evening came near, Kripa and the others went quietly to the lake Dwaipayana. They spoke softly to the king: "Come out, O king! We are still alive. Let all four of us fight with the Pandavas. If we win, you will still be the king. If we die, we will reach the heavens. Their army too is very thin. They cannot stand our attack. You must not stay here. Be our commander and lead us to the front". Duryodhana was very happy to hear their voices. From inside the waters he said: "I am happy to know that all three of you are alive. Of course I am set on fighting with them. But just now my body is mangled by the many hurts and wounds. I have no energy to fight. My mind too has been sorely wounded. I cannot fight today. It is evening and you are tired too. When I hear your words of affection, it makes me humble. What have I done that I should deserve so much love? I am proud of myself since I have been able to win the love of such men like you. But now, it is evening. I want to rest inside the waters. I will have new energy tomorrow. I am sure of it. We will fight with the Pandavas tomorrow". Aswatthama said: "Why should we wait till tomorrow? We will fight now. I swear that I will try and kill all of them. Come, my lord, let us fight now".

There were a few hunters who had come to the lake to drink some water. It was sheer accident that they were there when this conversation was going on. They had heard that the Pandavas were locking for the king who had escaped. From the conversation they realised that Duryodhana was hiding in the lake. They were sure to be rewarded by Yudhishthira if they gave him this piece of news. They hurried to the camp of the Pandavas. They went to Bheema and told him everything. He was mad with joy. He took them to Yudhishthira. He heard them. After rewarding them he sent them away. Accompanied by the heroes on their side, the Pandavas set out towards the Dwaipayana lake. Krishna, Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki and the sons of Draupadi, Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas with Sikhandi accompanied the Pandavas. It was evening. The sun was to set very soon. Aswat-

thama and the others heard their coming. They said: "The Pandavas are coming. They have discovered the lake. We wanted your majesty to know that they are here. We will make ourselves scarce". Hearing the words of his dear friends, Duryodhana said: "So be it". They went away from there. At some distance from there they saw a banyan tree. Their hearts were heavy with grief and concern about the king. They were exhausted in body. They spoke amongst themselves: "What is going to happen? Will there be a fight? What will the king do now? What are the Pandavas going to do?" They released the horses from the chariots and took shelter under the banyan tree.

CHAPTER 5

DURYODHANA READY TO FIGHT

The Pandavas came to the Dwaipayana lake. Yudhishthira said: "Krishna, look at the waters of the lake that have been stilled by the power of Duryodhana. He has entered the heart of the lake and is hiding from us. I will not allow him to escape from here. He cannot be allowed to escape alive. Even if Indra comes to help him with his Vajra, I will make him see our forefathers today". Yudhishthira was burning with all the anger he had stored up in his heart for years. Krishna smiled at his anger and said: "You can easily counteract the powers of Duryodhana. Kill him and make him atone for all the sins he has committed".

The next moment Yudhishthira went near the edge of the lake and stood there. He called out to Duryodhana: "I do not understand this action of yours, my dear cousin! You have killed all the kshatriyas who were ruling this Bharatavarsha. You have caused the death of all your relatives. Now you want to save yourself by hiding in this immense lake. Come out of the lake, Duryodhana, and fight with us. Where is your arrogance? Where is your pride? Where is your sense of honour? You seem to have become afraid all of a sudden. The world calls you a hero. I think the world is wrong. What is the use of your valour if you lose it all in a moment? Come out and fight. You are a kshatriya. You are born in a noble family: the family of the Kurus who are known the world over for their fearlessness. This is not right. It is a sin. It will not lead you to heaven. How can you wish to live after seeing all the heroes dead? Your brothers are all dead, there, on the battle-field. Your dear uncle Sakuni is there. Your friend Radheya, the

sutaputra, is there. You are a proud and sensitive person. You have always been jealous of your honour. Why then, are you hiding in this lake? Come out and fight. Fight with us. If you defeat us, you can still be the lord of the world. If you die, why then, you will go to heaven! You will have to come out and fight, if you are a man".

Duryodhana heard him from inside the lake. He spoke words in reply to the taunts of Yudhishthira. He said: "Yudhishthira, please stop this senseless talk of yours. I did not come away from the field for fear of your cheap bravery. I was on my horse. Seeing my dear brothers dead, and seeing my beloved uncle dead, my mind was clouded. I could not think at all. My horse bore me away from the field. It died later. I left it there and walked just aimlessly. My eyes fell on this lake. I thought I would cool my fevered limbs for a while. I am not afraid. Nor am I fond of this life of mine. You can also take some rest and your followers too. I will come out after I have rested, and fight with you. You can be sure of that".

Yudhishthira was glad to know that Duryodhana did not run away from the field like a coward. He could not think of Duryodhana as a coward. He said: "We are all fit enough to fight. Do not worry about us. We have been looking for you all this while. Come out now and fight". Duryodhana said: "I am not enamoured of the kingdom any longer. Those for whom I wanted this kingdom are all dead. My brothers are all dead. My Radheya, who was everything to me, is dead. The world has lost her splendour now. But, *I do want to fight with you,* and curb your pride. I do not see any need for war, now that Bheeshma has fallen: now that Drona and Radheya are dead. Your kingdom will be just so much earth and nothing else. I have enjoyed it to the full. My dear ones are all dead and you have snatched this land from me. You are welcome to it. I have no desire to live any more. You can enjoy this earth shorn of all her glory and all her loveliness and all her splendour. You can have the land of the Kurus. I am making a gift of this barren land to you, Yudhishthira. I will prefer a life in the forest, clad in tree bark and deer skin to one in this kingdom where nothing is left that has beauty. You can rule the land, Yudhishthira".

Yudhishthira was terrible in his anger now. He almost shouted at Duryodhana: "I do not like these mad ravings of yours, Duryodhana. I have no sympathy for you. You have the impertinence to make me a gift of this earth over which you have no right now. Even if you did have a right to give it away as a gift, remember that I am a kshatriya. I will not accept the world as a gift from you. I do not want to rule a kingdom which has been given to me as a gift by my enemy. Do not

insult me by your words, Duryodhana. I will win it by defeating you. How dare you suggest this to me?

"There was a time when you were lord of this earth. You had the evil Sakuni with you, and you banished us from the land which was our birthright. We came back from the exile and asked you in gentle words to give it back to us: it was what belonged to us. But you were not so generous then. When I sent Krishna to you with a proposal for peace, you sent word that not even ground covered by the tip of a sharp needle would be given to me. How is it you have become so generous all of a sudden? Your mind is unhinged. Or else, how can the great Duryodhana, the crowned monarch of the entire world, the man who would not part with even five villages, how can he have the heart to give away the entire kingdom to his sworn enemy? My lord, you have no kingdom now, to give it away so magnanimously. You and I have got to fight, so that this ancient rivalry can come to an end. I must be the sole monarch of this world. I will not allow any compromise. I will not allow you to live: not after all this. Come out and fight.

"For years this rivalry has existed. You have never been fond of us. For years you have tried to destroy us. We have now won the war. Your death is the one thing I want. I will see you dead. I am giving you a chance to reach the heavens which you do not deserve. Come out of the lake and fight". Yudhishthira was heaving with the emotion which was swelling up in his heart.

Duryodhana had never before heard such words of insult from any one. He was sorely hurt and wounded by the insults rained upon him by Yudhishthira. His proud and sensitive heart winced under the cruel words of Yudhishthira. He was surprised to hear so much fury in the voice of the gentle Yudhishthira. He wrung his hands together. He made up his mind to come out of the lake and fight. He had wanted a respite of just one night and he could not get it. But it was no matter. He would fight. The words of Yudhishthira were too sharp. He had to take up the challenge.

Duryodhana said: "You are all righteous men and yet, all of you are trying to fight with me, alone, without a chariot, and without any-one to fight for me. I have no armour, and I am wounded. I am not afraid of any one of you. I am not scared of Satyaki or of Dhrishta-dyumna or even Krishna. I am able to kill all of you now. But I am only grieved to see so many of you here trying to kill a man who is without armour and without any weapons. You are not righteous at all. It is Dharma which accompanies you in your journey out of this world and you are prepared to forego that for the sake of your anger against me. But that is your concern and not mine. I have

no worry. I am a kshatriya born in the House of the Kurus. I will fight with all of you and kill all of you. If I am killed, I will be happier, as I will then be with all those who are dear to me. I am eager to join Radheya. You cannot know what a noble man he was. You are not noble enough to realise his worth. I will kill all of you and then I will kill myself so that I can join Radheya. I am coming now. Prepare yourselves to die".

Like the sun coming into view from below the ocean, Duryodhana rose up from the lake and appeared on the surface. He was looking very handsome and wonderful. The sight of his firm shoulders and his broad chest brought a look of admiration in the eyes of all of them. Yudhishthira smiled at him and said: "I am proud and very happy to see that my brother is not a coward. You are indeed a worthy son of the House of the Kurus. You are brave and proud. You have lived up to your name and your reputation. I am proud of you, my dear Duryodhana. You are a kshatriya and it is but right that you should behave like one. Alone, and single-handed, you are prepared to fight with all of us. It is indeed commendable. But I will not allow it. You can fight with any one of us with any weapon you choose. If you win, you can take the world and rule it". These words were spoken impulsively by Yudhishthira. It was foolish on his part to say that Duryodhana was welcome to fight with any one of them with any weapon he chose. But Yudhishthira was a man who could not be angry for long. He became the old Yudhishthira once again.

Duryodhana was a prince. He was noble. He appreciated nobleness in anyone, even in his opponent. The offer of Yudhishthira roused all that was noble in him. He said: "I appreciate this offer on your part, my dear Yudhishthira. It looks as though we are nearly friends at the end of our lives! I will accept your offer. You ask me to choose my weapon. I have never loved any weapon more than this mace of mine. It has been my constant companion. I will fight with the mace. As for the opponent, I am prepared to fight with any one of you. I am sure to kill all of you, one by one. I am ready to fight".

Yudhishthira was very happy at the thought of Duryodhana fighting. He said: "You can fight with me. I will kill you and send you to the heavens which you now seem to deserve". Duryodhana looked wonderful as he stood there, his red eyes glaring at all of them like a lion looking at a crowd of cattle. With the mace in one hand and with the other hand on his chest, he stood winning the admiration of all of them. His body was covered with blood. A loud war-cry broke out from his lips. He said: "Come, I am prepared to fight with any one of you: your honoured self, or with your dear Sahadeva or Bheema

or Arjuna or Nakula. I will kill you all one by one and send you to heaven. I will bring this ancient rivalry to an end thus. There is no one to equal me in the fight with the mace. I am ready. Anyone can fight with me first".

CHAPTER 6

SAMANTAPANCHAKA

Krishna had been watching silently all the while. He went up to Yudhishthira and said: "I think you are the most foolish person I have ever seen in my life. This is foolhardiness. Duryodhana has been practising on an iron image of Bheema for the last so many years, to kill him. There is absolutely no chance of your ruling the world if any one other than Bheema fights with Duryodhana. Even Bheema has not had much of practice. Your compassion has been your undoing all these years. Why did you have to go and challenge him to a duel of all things? I think this is the beginning of another game of dice. The sons of Pandu are doomed to spend all their lives in the forest. Bheema is the more powerful of the two: but Duryodhana is the more skilful. In a duel, skill is more important than power. We have been weakened and placed in a very very precarious position by this offer of yours. After winning the war you have given him a chance to snatch the kingdom away from you again. There is no one who can face Duryodhana in a fair fight".

Bheema came to him and said: "Krishna, do not worry. I will kill him. I will reach the boundary of this river of hatred which has been flowing between Duryodhana and the Pandavas and particularly Bheema. I will challenge the great Duryodhana and ask him to fight with me. I am sure to win. Do not be worried about me. My mace is more powerful and I am the better of the two". Krishna was very happy to hear the words of Bheema. He said: "Bheema, Yudhishthira will be lord of the world because of you. You have killed all the other sons of Dhritarashtra and it is but right that you should be the person to kill the last of them. Win the world, Bheema, and lay it at the feet of your dear brother. The end of Duryodhana will be the end of all the troubles of Yudhishthira. But you must be very careful with Duryodhana. He is very good at the mace fight and he is very quick on his feet".

Bheema went to Duryodhana and challenged him. He said: "I

want you to fight with me, Duryodhana. I want you to remember all that you did to us. You might have forgotten all that. But we have not. Remember Varanavata: remember Draupadi when she was dragged to your court by Dussasana: remember the game of dice and the evil-minded Sakuni who was the cause of your downfall. Today I mean to make you reap the consequences of your sinful acts. Because of you, the battle-field is beautified by the noble and great who are gone. Our grandfather, our beloved Bheeshma, is now lying on a bed of arrows because of you. Drona, our dear acharya, a man who should have been honoured till the end of his life, lies dead on the battle-field. Radheya, the sutaputra, is lying on the field like a second sun illuminating the earth. Our uncle Salya, whom you lured to your side, has now been killed by his own nephew who should have honoured him. Your dear brothers are all glowing on the field like the embers of a fire that was once raging. For all these terrible deaths I will make you suffer. I am going to kill you. I will certainly kill you and please my beloved brother who was made to sleep on the ground". Bheema's voice was harsh with emotion.

Duryodhana listened to his words with a sneer on his lips and with one eyebrow raised in supercilious amusement. He said: "Do not shout so much, Bheema. Why do you talk so much without action? Let me see you in action. For years I have wanted to fight this duel with you. I am happy to see that you are man enough to challenge me. There is no one who has beaten me in the fight with a mace, so far. In this entire world and in the heavens too, no one can stand against me. In a fair fight even Indra will not be able to fight with me and win. Let me see you fight. I admit that among you five, you are the best opponent I can choose. The others are not fit enough to oppose me. I am prepared to pay you that compliment. You are good enough to fight with me. Next to me, I would place the great Salya. After him, you are the best. All this is, of course, after my lord Balarama. He is the greatest. He has said that I am better than all of you put together. Balarama has said that I am the greatest fighter with the mace. I am ready for the fight. Come, Bheema". Yudhishthira said: "My dear Duryodhana, put on your armour and bind up your locks. Take anything else you want. You can then begin to fight". Duryodhana looked at him with something like affection. He had never hated Yudhishthira. He hated only Bheema. In his desire for the riches of Yudhishthira, he had done all this injustice to him. Duryodhana was overcome with respect and admiration for this man who was so noble. He realised that he was indeed the brother of Radheya. He could see how much resemblance there was between these two. He brushed away these thoughts and got ready for the

fight. He put on his golden armour. He placed on his head his beautiful crown. He looked magnificent as he stood there, in the evening light, glowing like the setting sun.

The fight was about to begin. Just then the great Balarama came to their presence. All of them were extremely pleased to see him. He had heard from the sage Narada that the great Gadayuddha was to be fought between his students. Duryodhana was his favourite pupil and he wanted to be there when the duel was fought. They welcomed him. Bheema and Duryodhana saluted him. Duryodhana was very happy to see his guru there. He sent for an excellently covered seat to be placed for Balarama. The fight was waiting to begin. Balarama said: "I have just returned from a tour of all the holy places. I am told that the Samantapanchaka, which is very near, is the holiest of all places. A person who dies on that spot will certainly reach heaven. I suggest that the Gadayuddha be fought on that spot". "So be it", said Yudhishthira, and they all walked towards Samantapanchaka. Duryodhana, with the mace in his hand, walked on with the others. The sight was grand. It was a unique spectacle: the Kaurava monarch walking on foot with the Pandava host towards the place chosen for the duel. His head was held so high. His bearing was as proud and arrogant as ever. The coming of Balarama was an added pleasure to Duryodhana who was surrounded by his enemies. He walked on with the Pandavas. Krishna was walking with Balarama, and Satyaki was a few steps behind.

Chapter 7

THE FALL OF DURYODHANA

The two heroes were ready to fight. Everyone was waiting to see the Gadayuddha that was to be fought between two masters. The fight began. It looked like two oceans trying to mingle with each other or like two thunderclouds charging against each other. Both were powerful: both were students of Balarama: both were brothers, sons of the great House of the Kurus: both were bent on destroying each other. It was a dreadful sight to see two handsome men standing with their maces uplifted, to kill each other. The king addressed Yudhishthira: "I want all of you to be seated. Watch this great fight between us and enjoy it. It will please all those who are fond of us to watch this fight". They sat around the spot where they were stationed to fight.

Balarama looked very beautiful with his blue silk covering his fair frame. By his side sat Krishna, dark and handsome. They looked like the moon and a dark cloud by its side.

The fight was on. Duryodhana and Bheema were both wonderful with their maces and it was a beautiful sight: the glorious display of two heroes. They fought for a while and both became so exhausted. Both rested for a while and the fight was resumed. The clash of steel against steel was deafening. Sparks flew from the maces when they hit against each other. Duryodhana was very graceful and Bheema's strokes were powerful. Krishna was right. There was no doubt about the superiority of Duryodhana. Balarama was watching the fight with pleased eyes and Krishna was watching him covertly. The way the fighters circled about each other was a delightful sight. It was in accordance with the code of the fight, and both were observing all the rules strictly. Duryodhana would strike at the mace of Bheema and force it out of his hand. With an angry cry Bheema would recover it and the fight would continue. Bheema did the same to Duryodhana. Recovering his mace, Duryodhana struck at Bheema with all his might. He was furious. Bheema was stunned by the blow. But he was able to compose himself. He flung his mace at Duryodhana. With very graceful movements Duryodhana stepped aside and the mace fell on the ground. The fight was going on. It looked as though it would never end. Twice Bheema fainted unable to bear the hard hitting of Duryodhana. Once Duryodhana fell down. Bheema waited for him to get up. After a while Duryodhana fell once again. But on the whole, Bheema was not finding it as easy as he thought, to fight with Duryodhana. During the war he had fought twice with Salya with the mace, and both the times he had been able to vanquish that great hero. But Duryodhana was far superior to Salya. Bheema fought valiantly. He was a wonderful hitter. Duryodhana seemed to be dancing on the field. His feet were so nimble and his tread was so light. Bheema's steps were more heavy and at times his fighting looked crude.

While they were fighting, Arjuna was talking to Krishna. He said: "Krishna, who is the superior of the two? Who deserves to win? Please tell me what you think about it". Krishna smiled a soft smile. He said: "They have both been trained by my brother. They are both good. But, Arjuna, it must be evident even to you that Duryodhana is far superior to Bheema. Bheema is more powerful no doubt, but Duryodhana is quick, nimble and very skilful. Look how beautifully he evades the powerful hits of Bheema! In a fair fight Duryodhana cannot be killed. Bheema will have to take to unfair fight if he has any desire to win. This brother of yours, this Yudhishthira, has been foolish enough to arrange this fight. Can you not see that Duryodhana

is desperate? He will fight his best. Look how lightly he jumps up to avoid the powerful hit of Bheema! It is a delight to watch this man's skill. If only there was not a kingdom at stake, I would spend hours together here, watching this Gadayuddha. But Bheema has got to end the fight soon. I wonder how he is going to do it". Arjuna remembered the oath of Bheema. When Bheema's eyes were turned in his direction, Arjuna looked at Bheema and struck his own thigh forcibly. Bheema caught his meaning. Krishna was smiling all the while.

Yudhishthira was in a sad frame of mind. He became sure that his Bheema would be killed by Duryodhana. The fight was going on. Duryodhana was careering around Bheema with his mace uplifted, to kill him when the chance came. They fought for a while and again became exhausted. They rested again and a few moments later they resumed the fight. The very air was tense. Duryodhana dealt a terrible blow at Bheema. Bheema almost fainted away. Duryodhana thought that he had fainted. But Bheema was able to control his weakness. He raised his mace aloft and approached Duryodhana with the intention of hitting him in the chest. Cheating him of his plans, Duryodhana jumped up nimbly into the air and made the hit of Bheema futile. It was repeated. Bheema came up once again with his mace uplifted. Again Duryodhana sprang up into the air to dodge the blow. When he was leaping up, Bheema hit on his beautiful thighs. At one fell blow the thighs of Duryodhana were broken. He fell on the ground like a serpent whose waist had been crushed.

Duryodhana lay on the ground like Aruna, the divine charioteer of the sun. The sky resounded with sudden peals of thunder. The very earth quaked in protest at this injustice done in a fight. It was a very wrong thing to do. Bheema killed Duryodhana by unfair means. It was not appreciated by men who believed in fairness. But Bheema was wild with joy. His dream, his dream which had been always haunting him, had come true. He had broken the thighs of Duryodhana, as he had sworn to do, fourteen years back. He jumped for joy. It was terrible to see him. He looked like someone not of this world. He rushed up to the fallen monarch and placed his foot on that beautiful head. He said: "All of you laughed at me and danced when we left Hastinapura. You and your dear brothers called me 'cow'. I have not forgotten it. I swore that some day I would place my foot on your head. I have done it now".

Before he could do it again, Yudhishthira rushed up to him and dragged him away from there. He said: "Bheema, do not do it. You have done what you had sworn to do. That ends all enmity. This act is an insult to Duryodhana. He is a king. He is your brother. He is a son of the House of Kurus. He was the lord of eleven Akshau-

hinis. He has lost everything, and it is not right that you should do this to him when he is down. He is not to be insulted. I will not allow it. I am not pleased with this insult you have offered to a fallen monarch". His eyes were full of tears. He went to Duryodhana and said: "My dear cousin, please do not grieve for yourself. You have lost everything you had, and now you are on the ground, about to lose your life. This is no fault of ours but it is all because of you. You have brought it all on yourself and Destiny has arranged things in this manner. Duryodhana, I am jealous of you. You will reach the heavens, while we will have to live on this earth which is bereft of all her glory. I salute you, King of the World". Yudhishthira gave way to the grief in his heart. He was so unhappy to see the ruin of the world because of this one man, and now, his ruin too. The king was now on the ground, his thighs broken by Bheema. It was a great tragedy and Yudhishthira, with his gentle nature, could not bear it.

CHAPTER 8

BALARAMA'S WRATH

Balarama was furious with Bheema for his unfair fighting. He said: "Bheema, you have today brought disgrace to your guru by doing what you have done. You have hit your opponent below the waist. It is the meanest action on the part of a fighter, and I am going to kill you for this. You have killed my beloved pupil by unfair means. I will avenge the death of Duryodhana". Balarama lifted up the plough, his personal weapon, and rushed at Bheema. Krishna rushed up to him and stopped him by holding him back with his arms thrown about him. Krishna said: "My lord, forbear from this fury. What Bheema did was right. This particular act, perhaps, was against the rules of fair fighting. But in your blind affection for Duryodhana you seem to forget all that he has done to the Pandavas. He has never been fair. He has been a cheat all along. The Pandavas tried their best to avert a war. You know it. It is well known how much injustice has been meted out to the Pandavas. When the beautiful Draupadi was dragged to the presence of this arrogant man, he insulted her in the presence of all the Pandavas by showing his thigh to her and asking her to join his harem. Can any man bear that insult to his wife? These thighs should have been broken then. But they were not. Yudhishthira prevented Bheema from rushing at Duryodhana. And Bheema took an

oath that some day he would break those thighs of Duryodhana. That is why he did it. Or else, how can his oath be fulfilled? An oath is to be achieved at all costs. That is the rule.

"My dear brother, you cannot bear this one injustice done to your beloved Duryodhana. You are now ready to kill all the Pandavas by rushing at them with your plough. But I have been seeing the injustice done to the Pandavas for the last so many years. If I had so desired, I could also have killed this man and punished him. I could easily have avenged the sufferings of these good men and the tears of Draupadi. But I did not interfere till the war was declared. I tried my level best to avert the war. Again, I have not fought in this war at all. You wanted me to be indifferent. How can one stand by and watch injustice for a long time without interfering? You were ready to do it now: you, who turned your back on the war since you could not bear to see the end of the Kauravas. Please do not try to avenge the killing of this sinful man. Leave him to his fate, and the Pandavas too. They are our cousins and, after so many years of suffering, they are hoping to be happy. Please do not be angry with them".

Balarama was slightly mollified by the words of Krishna. But he was not convinced at all. Krishna said: "My lord, remember that the fourth quarter of Time, Kali, has already stepped in. We cannot find unsullied righteousness from now on. Even in the war, the first nine days were untainted by unrighteousness. From the tenth day, the tone of the war changed. The purity was clouded by small acts of Adharma and it grew day by day. It is the rule of Time. You must not try to change the course of Destiny. She will have her way. She is unrighteous too, and she fulfils herself in many ways, mostly unrighteous. I, for one, feel that the end justifies the means".

Balarama said: "I am not convinced by your honeyed tongue, Krishna. This Bheema has today killed Duryodhana by unfair fighting. The world will always speak of him as a bad fighter, as one who did not observe the rules of fighting. I am proud of Duryodhana. *He will reach the heavens and he will be there eternally*. He is a fair fighter. The world will always remember the Gadayuddha. It spells eternal glory to Duryodhana and lasting shame to Bheema". Spitting out these words, Balarama went to Duryodhana and took tender leave of him. Duryodhana's eyes were full of love and gratitude for this great man who was ready to fight the Pandavas for his sake. Balarama left the spot with an angry face and ascended his chariot. He hurried to Dwaraka without even bidding farewell to the Pandavas. Krishna must have mentally heaved a sigh of relief. He did not mind the anger of Balarama now. A bowl of wine set before him by the fair hands of Revati would

make him forget all this. Krishna had been able to save the Pandavas from the wrath of his dreadful brother. That was enough.

Krishna was sorry for Bheema. He was standing crest-fallen at the words of Balarama. He had been dreaming of this moment all these years. They all knew about his oath. They knew that he would do it. Actually, during the fight, he had forgotten the oath. It was Arjuna who had reminded him of it and, now, Arjuna himself was standing aside as though he did not approve of his action either. Krishna guessed all that was passing through the mind of Bheema, and he came to him. He took Bheema's hand in his and said: "Bheema, I am proud of you. You have done what you had sworn to do. It is not given to every man to fulfil an oath. I am glad to see that you have done all that you had been longing to do". Yudhishthira smiled at Bheema. Bheema rushed to the presence of his brother. He fell at his feet. Bathing them with his tears he said: "I am offering this world to you, my lord. It is yours. The long, long story of hatred is ended. You have no more enemies. You are free from the pain which was hurting you all these years. Draupadi will give up sleeping on the floor. She will be happy. I have achieved all that I have wanted to achieve. I crave for your blessings, my lord".

Yudhishthira lifted him up and embraced him. The Pandava host now broke out into wild shouts of joy. The tension caused by the anger of Balarama had been snapped by this tender scene between Bheema and his brother. They all rushed to Bheema and they congratulated him over his victory over Duryodhana.

Krishna said: "Let us not kill this man who has already been slain. This man, this Duryodhana, was the greatest sinner on this earth. He had so many people to advise him to do the right thing. He would not listen to the words of Vidura. Instead, he listened only to the advice of Sakuni and treated his cousins shamefully. That is why he is lying on the ground, dying. Let us leave him and go away from here. He is now worse than a piece of wood".

Duryodhana had been listening to the words of all of them. He rose upon his waist like a wounded cobra which is not dead yet. He was suffering intense agony because of his efforts to raise his body. But he did not mind all that. He said: "Krishna, stop these words. You are just a slave of Kamsa. You are not even a king. You have no shame. I have been killed most unfairly, and you are gloating over my fall. You were responsible for this act of Bheema. I do not blame him at all. In all fairness to Bheema, I must say that he had forgotten his oath. He was fighting a fair game. You brought the talk round to unfair fighting, when you were talking to Arjuna. You spoke loud deliberately to make Bheema hear you. Arjuna slapped his thigh.

Do you think I did not mark it? You have caused so many kings to be killed by unfair means, and you dare to call me a sinner! I know all your actions, Krishna. You were the cause of the great war and the slaughter of so many men. You brought Sikhandi to the front of the chariot of our grandfather and made Arjuna kill him. Do you think I did not mark it? You caused the elephant called Aswatthama to be killed and it was you who made Dhrishtadyumna kill Drona. Do you think I did not mark it? It was you who made Ghatotkacha face Radheya and made the Sakti of Radheya to be wasted on that beast. Do you think I did not mark it? It was you who made Arjuna kill Radheya when his chariot wheel was caught in the mire. Do you think I did not mark it? If the Pandavas had fought with Bheeshma and Drona and Radheya by fair means, they would never have won this war. You, Krishna, you are the greatest sinner here, and not I who have been killed by unfair means".

Krishna turned on him with angry eyes. He said: "Listen to me, Duryodhana. You have been killed because of your adharma. You have killed all your friends and all your dependants by your unrighteousness. Bheeshma and Drona and Radheya were killed because they took up your cause against that of the Pandavas. Bheeshma should not have sided with you. Drona could have left Hastinapura and gone away to the forest. Radheya was bent on pleasing you. He knew that you were in the wrong and yet he fought for you. It is because of you and your wicked deeds that they have been killed. You say that I am the cause of this war. Have you so soon forgotten my coming to Hastinapura? Have you forgotten the trouble I took to convince you that the war should not be fought? You would not let the world out of your grasp. Your avarice has been the cause of this war and the death of all the heroes. Your wickedness goes far back into the time when you were just a young boy. The young plant of jealousy was encouraged to grow, by your father and your uncle Sakuni. It is the fruits of that tree that you are tasting now. For the death of Abhimanyu, for that one incident, you must be killed again and again. You do not deserve the sympathy of anyone. I am not sorry for you".

Duryodhana smiled a wan smile. His eyebrow was raised in the old supercilious way. He said: "I have studied the Vedas. I have made many gifts to many people. I have ruled this wide world. I have tasted her to the full. I have walked over the heads of my enemies. I am very fortunate. After a happy life, I have a happy future ahead of me. I am going to the heavens which are to be attained by those who die on the field of battle. I will meet all those who are dear to me, there, in heaven. I will be with my dear friend Radheya. I am indeed more fortunate than these people who will have to live on in this

world full of grief". Duryodhana paused for breath. A look of utter disdain came to his eyes. He smiled a bitter smile and said: "As for Bheema stamping on my head, I do not mind it: not at all. A few moments more, and crows and hawks will be pecking into my head". There fell from the sky flowers on the head of Duryodhana when he spoke these words. The sky was clear and soft like the light inside an opal. The Pandavas hung their heads in shame and sorrow when they saw that the heavens approved of the words of Duryodhana.

Krishna turned on all of them his angry eyes. He thundered at them in his beautiful swan-like voice: "Of course they were all slain by unfair means! They were all the very flowers of kshatriya prowess. If you had fought by fair means they could never have been defeated, leave alone the question of their being killed! Not all your powers with the bows and arrows and your divine astras could have given you victory over those heroes. This Duryodhana could never have been killed in fair fight. Look at me and listen to me carefully. Long ago, in the Kamyaka forest, I wiped the tears from the eyes of my dear Draupadi and promised to her that I would cause the death of all those who had made her cry. Yudhishthira, you did not mind the insult to her in the court at Hastinapura. You were bent only on the right or wrong of it. You allowed your wife to be insulted by these animals, and you stood silent because you thought it was not righteous to interfere. You stopped Bheema from doing what he should have done. But *I* could not let Draupadi cry. When she was in the court no one came to her help. The great Bheeshma and Drona and all the others never helped her. I swore to kill everyone of them. Yes, everyone of them. I killed the great Bheeshma because he had not the courage to interfere when the beasts of the court were harassing Draupadi. I killed Drona for the same reason. He was also indifferent on the day when the game of dice was played. He had no right to join the war and fight on the side of Duryodhana when he knew that the Pandavas were in the right. He loved this sinner and so, with Bheeshma, Drona too had to die. I am bent on only one thing: the righting of a wrong done to good men. I have achieved it. I am not sorry.

"As for the sin of all this unfair fighting, let it fall on my head. I am prepared to shoulder that too for the sake of the Pandavas. They mean my very life to me. But come, the sun has reached the western hill. Let us go away from here". The entire Pandava host went away from the neighbourhood of Samantapanchaka. The king was there, all alone, dying, with his thighs broken, with no one by his side.

AFTER

THE

WAR

Chapter 1

ARJUNA'S CHARIOT

The Pandavas returned to their camps. It was the rule that they should enter the camp of the enemies. They proceeded towards the camp of Duryodhana. They entered, blowing their conchs. The Panchajanya and the great Devadatta were blown lustily. Krishna did not want their enthusiasm to be damped by the scene at Samantapanchaka. He was the most cheerful among all of them. As soon as they arrived at the camp, Krishna asked them all to stand still. He told Arjuna: "Arjuna, take up your Gandiva and your quivers. Get down from the chariot". Krishna was still sitting in the chariot. Arjuna did as he was bid. After he had got down, Krishna abandoned the reins and the whip and descended from the golden chariot fretted with gems. The moment Krishna got down, the great Hanuman who was on the banner, suddenly sprang into the skies and disappeared from their sight. It was amazing. They all turned their eyes on Arjuna's chariot. Even as they were all looking, the chariot began to burn like a pile of wood, and in a matter of a few moments it was just a heap of ashes. The white horses of Arjuna were all burnt up. The chariot of Arjuna, the sight of which would strike terror into the hearts of the Kauravas, was now a heap of ashes.

Arjuna turned his tear-filled eyes to Krishna and said: "My lord, what is this I see? My chariot, my golden chariot which was given to me by Agni when he burnt the Khandava forest, my chariot which was driven by you all these days, this my chariot is burnt up under my eyes and for no reason at all! I do not understand! Please tell me why this happened". Krishna's face was stern. He said: "Arjuna, its purpose has been served. It is not necessary any more. This chariot has taken all the many astras of Drona and Radheya. It has withstood the Brahmastra sent by those two men and the astras of Aswatthama. It should have been burnt up long ago. But I was sitting on it and so it was not burnt. I have abandoned it now after you have achieved what you set out to achieve. So it is burnt. I have allowed it to become reduced to ashes. Everything in this world is created for a purpose. The moment the purpose is served, it is not needed any more". The sternness left the face of Krishna. He was smiling once again.

Again Krishna said: "Arjuna, it is even so with men. Each man is set on this strange eventful journey called life. He has been sent

into this world with a purpose. Once that purpose is served, the earth has no more need of him. It is the case with all of us, even me. I have created myself on this earth for a purpose. It is not yet over. Something still remains. The moment it is finished, I will die too, and so will you and your dear brothers. But that is not to be in the near future. Come, do not grieve. Let us set about our next task".

Krishna congratulated Yudhishthira in formal terms and embraced him. Krishna said: "Yudhishthira, it is customary for the winners to sleep outside the enemy camp on the night of their victory. You must observe it. You must all sleep away from your camp". "So be it", said Yudhishthira. He was silent for a moment. Then he said: "Krishna, the war is ended, and by your grace we have won the world. But I am afraid. Gandhari, the mother of Duryodhana, is possessed of great powers. She has been god-fearing and righteous. She is now suffering the sorrow of a mother who has lost her children. Hearing that her Duryodhana has been killed by unfair means, she may curse us. I want you to go and pacify her. We will follow later on". Krishna smiled and said: "You are right. The curse of Gandhari must not be spent on you. There are others to receive it. I will go at once".

When Duryodhana fell with his thighs broken, Sanjaya went back to the city. With his eyes raining tears, with his frame trembling with anguish, with his two arms raised aloft in mourning, Sanjaya entered the palace of the king Dhritarashtra. He said: "Oh, my king! Oh, my lord! We have lost everything. Time and Fate have robbed us of all that we had". The old king was there with Gandhari and the wives of his sons. Vidura was there, and so many others. Sanjaya composed himself and said: "My lord, I am Sanjaya. The war is ended. Salya is gone. Sakuni is gone. His son Uluka is dead. Duryodhana has been killed by Bheema". Dhritarashtra fell down in a dead faint. Vidura was overcome by faintness too. The king would regain consciousness and lose it again. It was pitiable to see the condition of the king. The women attendants tried to revive Gandhari. They could not. She was in a dead swoon.

After a while, they composed themselves, and Vidura tried to console the weeping parents of Duryodhana. It was then that Krishna arrived in Hastinapura. He entered the palace and was taken to the hall where Dhritarashtra was seated. Tears came to his eyes when he saw the condition of the king and his heart was torn when he saw that grand lady Gandhari sunk in woe. He wept at the sight of these two old parents who were grieving for their dead sons. He spoke to them for a long time. He spoke to them gentle loving words. He was full of compassion and he spoke to them with his heart full of love

and sympathy. He convinced them that the death of all the great heroes was because of Duryodhana.

Finally he spoke to Gandhari: "Mother, on the day I came to Hastinapura on a mission of peace, Duryodhana tried to capture me. You stopped him: or rather, you tried to stop him with the words: 'Where there is righteousness, there is victory'. Mother, it is even so. You must not blame the Pandavas for this calamity. Yudhishthira is grieved because he has caused you so much unhappiness. You know how much he tried to avoid the war. Please be kind to the children of Pandu. They have suffered so much in life. They have never had a father. You must be affectionate towards them. You must not turn your angry eyes on the sons of Pandu".

Dhritarashtra and Gandhari were consoled by the sweet and gentle words of Krishna. Gandhari said: "What you say is true, Krishna. As soon as I heard that my child, my Duryodhana, was killed, my heart was shaken by emotion, and my reason threatened to give way. But now, after hearing your words, I feel better. I will conduct myself with fairness towards the sons of Kunti. With my children dead, I have no one to comfort me, except you". She cried again and Krishna pacified her with kind words. He took leave of them and went back to the Pandavas. The night was spent by them outside the camp of Duryodhana. The Pandavas had just Krishna and Satyaki with them. The rest were in the Pandava camp.

Chapter 2

ASWATTHAMA'S GRIEF

Sanjaya went back to the presence of the king. He saw Duryodhana writhing in agony. His body was covered with dust and his eyes were weeping futile tears. Looking at the monarch, alone, in pain, Sanjaya's heart was ready to break. This was the king who had the entire world at his feet. There was no one to equal him in his glory and in wealth. He had never known what it was to walk even in the streets. His palace was like a temple. Sanjaya thought of the procession of the royal household when the king would go seated on his elephant looking like the lord of the heavens on his Airavata. This king was today lying on the ground, his thighs broken, with no one by his side to speak comforting words. He was alone. Sanjaya thought Fate was a

terrible thing. It was the great Leveller. It knew no difference between king and soldier.

Duryodhana's hands were pressed hard on the ground and he was trying his best to bear the pain in his body. His head was shaking weakly, and he was trying to control himself. Sanjaya came near him and sat by his side. His frame was racked by sobs. Duryodhana looked at him. He said: "What a gentle soul you are, Sanjaya! You have come to me to keep company. This life refuses to leave this mangled body. I am passing through hell. I am reaching the heavens. Fate wants me to taste hell first, for all my sins, perhaps. This pain is unbearable. Look at me! I had Bheeshma, Drona, Kripa, Aswatthama, Radheya, Salya, Kritavarma, Dussasana and a thousand others with me, and I was sure of winning the war. I am now here, on the ground, defeated in a duel by unfair means, and I cannot even die. I was the lord of eleven Akshauhinis; look at my condition now. I want you to do something for me. You must find out where the three survivors are. Tell them that their king has been defeated in an unfair fight by Bheema. Tell them that the king is still alive and would like to see them before he dies. Tell my parents about my condition. Tell my mother that her son did not run away from the battle-field. Tell her that I died bravely. Tell her that I have no regrets. Go now and send Aswatthama, Kritavarma and Kripa to me". He collapsed on the ground. The effort of talking was too much for him. Several of the citizens of Hastinapura came to pay him their last respects. But he had become immune to it all. He had fainted away.

The three remaining friends of Duryodhana hurried to his side when they heard about him from Sanjaya. They saw him there, on the ground, with his thighs broken, sighing like a broken serpent. They rushed to him. Aswatthama, recovering from the faint which had come over him, took the hands of the king in his and said: "My lord, my king, I am grieved to see you like this". Duryodhana spoke with great effort. He said: "Evidently it is written in the Book of Fate that this should be the end. I am not sorry, my friends. I have every assurance that I will reach the heavens to join all those who have gone there ahead of me. Fate is too powerful. It is no use blaming it on others". He lay down, wiping his tears with his hands and pushing away his matted hair from his forehead. Aswatthama glowed like fire with anger. He said: "These Pandavas have been hiding behind the cloak of Dharma, and they are more unrighteous than confirmed sinners. They killed my father by the meanest lie imaginable. They have now killed you in such a cruel manner. Listen to my words, my friend. I will today destroy all the Panchalas under the very eyes of Krishna.

I will kill the Pandavas tonight. Grant me permission, my king. I will not rest till they are all killed".

Duryodhana was touched by the affection Aswatthama bore him. There was a time when he thought that Aswatthama was more fond of the Pandavas. Duryodhana said: "Acharya, please bring water in a vessel". It was brought. The king said: "We will officially make you the commander of our army. I wish Aswatthama to be given the coronation bath". The coronation was over. The king was happy to have someone to avenge the cruel death of all the heroes in the Kaurava army. He thanked the great Aswatthama for his love, and sent them away. He was very happy, and very unhappy too.

The three men left the king on the ground and went towards the south. Their minds were busy with thoughts about the task ahead of them. They were tired out and hurt by the many arrows that had been shot at them all through the day. They reached a spot very near the camp of the Pandavas. They were now in a small forest which hugged the battle-field. They found some water. After their thirst was quenched, they rested under the trees. Kripa was very tired and so was Kritavarma. The moment they placed their heads on the ground they were fast asleep. They were so exhausted with the day's fight and with the mental anguish.

Aswatthama was awake. He could not sleep. He sat there looking at everything and at nothing in particular. His mind was busy thinking out a plan to avenge the death of his father and, more than that, the killing of Duryodhana by Bheema. He was looking around. He saw that the tree was full of nests built by crows. The crows were all sleeping peacefully. Suddenly an owl came. It was a terrible-looking bird. It came quietly to the tree. Its coming was noiseless. It set about the task of destroying the sleeping crows. There was a great massacre of all the crows. After destroying them, the owl looked happy. It went back to where it came from.

The owl gave an idea to Aswatthama. He thought that it was the best thing to do. He would go to the Pandava camp and kill all of them. They would be fast asleep. Tonight was the first night of peaceful sleep for all of them. He could wreak his vengeance on all of them. Aswatthama was so excited that he could not sit still. He woke up the others from sleep. They wanted to know what the matter was. Aswatthama told them about the owl and how he got the idea from it. They were horrified at the suggestion. Kripa said: "Aswatthama, your idea of punishing the Pandavas is not right. After all, our king was not an ideal king. He was a cruel man. He was not righteous. He had treated them so badly all these years. They had to kill him. The breaking of the thighs of our Duryodhana was the

oath of Bheema, which was taken in the presence of all of us. It was an unfair fight, I admit. But we cannot stand in judgement on the workings of Nemesis. You have sworn to avenge the death of the king and that of your father. It is commendable. But we will do it openly. We will, the three of us, challenge them and fight till we die. But this plan of yours is dastardly. It is evil. If you carry it out, you will incur infamy and the censure of all right-minded people. I am not for this. Please, Aswatthama, desist from this sin. Your name has been untainted so far. Do not soil the purity of your reputation by this sin".

Aswatthama was adamant. He refused to be convinced. He was set on this. He felt that the river of Dharma had broken its banks and it was the Pandavas who had begun the unfair fighting. The death of his father at the hands of Dhrishtadyumna was still a raw wound in his mind. On top of that came the killing of Duryodhana, his dear friend. He was mad. He said: "I am definite about what I am going to do. If you do not want to support me, I do not care. I will go alone and do the needful". Aswatthama got into his chariot. He had with him a sword which Lord Sankara had given him. He took it in his hand and set out towards the Pandava camp. Kritavarma and Kripa shouted to him that they would also go with him. Happiness or sorrow, good or bad, had to be shared by them from then on. They had made an unspoken pact. They were the only three left out of the army of the great Duryodhana. They had to avenge the killing of Duryodhana, their master.

Chapter 3

THE MIDNIGHT MASSACRE

The chariot of Aswatthama reached the camp. Kripa and Kritavarma were with him. But when he entered the tents, they were outside. They promised to him that they would not let anyone escape. They were stationed at the entrance to the camp. Aswatthama went in the dark towards the tent of Dhrishtadyumna. He entered it. He saw the great Dhrishtadyumna sleeping peacefully on a snow-white bed. Aswatthama approached him with noiseless steps. He kicked him violently. Dhrishtadyumna woke up from his sleep. But he was not able to defend himself. Aswatthama had caught hold of his hair and was raining kicks on him. He began to press him down on his bed.

Aswatthama took up the string of the bow and tied it round the neck of the unfortunate Dhrishtadyumna and tried to strangle him. Indistinctly Dhrishtadyumna murmured: "Kill me with an arrow. Fight with me and send me to heaven. This is not a good death for a kshatriya".. Aswatthama laughed like one possessed. He said: "You are a man who killed his guru. I will not let you reach heaven. You will go to hell. That is what you deserve. You will be damned for ever". Aswatthama strangled the life out of Dhrishtadyumna. He kicked him all over the body till he was dead.

Hearing the noise of the struggle, people who were around got up from their sleep. They thought that some rakshasa had entered the camp. The Panchalas got up and tried to fight with him. But Aswatthama killed all of them. Everyone was slaughtered. The sons of Draupadi tried their best to resist him. But it was easy for Aswatthama to kill all the people in the camp. Uttamaujas, Yudhamanyu, the heroes who had come out of the war unscathed, were now slaughtered in their sleep. Sikhandi was dead. Everyone was killed. People were trying to escape. But Kripa and Kritavarma, who were stationed at the gate, prevented this. Kripa set fire to the camp. It made it easier for the son of Drona to continue his work of destruction. The camp had been made to burn up in three different places and the great acharya Kripa was responsible for this good deed. These men had become beasts: no, worse than beasts. Beasts never kill their own kind. They kill if they need food and they kill if they are in danger. But this inhuman deed, this midnight massacre of sleeping men, was the work of men who did not deserve to be called men.

The three men, drunk with the joy of having achieved this feat, hurried to the spot where Duryodhana was dying. Life had not left his mangled body. He lifted his head up at the noise they made by their approach. The wild animals had already begun to come near Duryodhana. He was trying hard to keep them from coming too near. He was defenceless against this dreadful brood of wild animals. The three men came near him and sat down. They saw the mace of the king lying by his side: the mace which was his only friend. Kripa said: "Evidently, my lord, your gada is to be your companion to heaven. You will not abandon your best friend". Aswatthama said: "Duryodhana, I want you to listen to me carefully. I am happy to tell you that I have destroyed the entire Pandava army. The five Pandavas with Krishna and Satyaki are alive on their side, and on ours we three are alive". He told the king how he had managed to massacre the entire army. Duryodhana was pleased. He said: "Aswatthama, you have today achieved what Bheeshma, Drona or Radheya could not do. I am proud of you. May God bless you.

I am now ready to die. We will all meet in heaven. I take leave of you and this dear earth". The king was silent. The great Duryodhana, the Kaurava monarch, was dead.

It is said that, the moment Duryodhana died, Sanjaya lost the power of seeing all that happened to everyone. The power was withdrawn from him.

The sun ushered in the most terrible of all days. The charioteer of Dhrishtadyumna was the sole survivor in the massacre in the camp. He hurried to the presence of Yudhishthira and told him about the tragic events of the night. Yudhishthira fainted with the shock. It was Satyaki who supported his limp form. All the Pandava brothers were without their senses. Yudhishthira was revived, and the others. Yudhishthira spoke to Nakula, asking him to bring Draupadi. Nakula hurried to the quarters of the queen. The king went to the camp accompanied by his brothers and saw the awful scene. He could not bear to see them all dead. The sight of the brave Dhrishtadyumna was too much for him. This man, this fire-born Dhrishtadyumna, had steered them through the great war, and he was now dead: killed in the most ruthless manner imaginable. The five sons of Draupadi were there, their bodies cut up by the sword of Aswatthama. Arjuna saw Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas, and his heart broke with the shock of it. Bheema and Satyaki sat by the dead form of their dear friend Dhrishtadyumna. Neither could comfort the other.

Nakula's chariot was heard to approach. They all saw Draupadi. She was helped out of the chariot. She took two steps towards her dead sons and collapsed on the ground. Her grief could not be assuaged by words. Draupadi lamented her fate. It was a terrible thing to see Draupadi with the dead forms of her sons, her brothers, all around her. She had lost all that was hers in a single night. It was something the like of which had never happened to anyone before. Suddenly she stood up. She dried her tears. There was now fire leaping out of her eyes. She said: "Unless and until that Aswatthama is killed, I will not eat. I will die on this spot". They told her that Aswatthama could not be killed since he had been granted eternal life. Draupadi said: "The death of my sons and my brothers must be avenged. I know that Aswatthama has a jewel on his head. Bring that to me. Make him lose it. The loss of that jewel will be worse than death for him. Bheema, you are the one man who will do it for me. You must please me". "So be it", said Bheema. He set out in search of Aswatthama. Nakula was his charioteer. Yudhishthira was trying in vain to pacify the unfortunate Draupadi with gentle words. He was himself so unhappy. It was a terrible sight to see her form racked by

sobs and with her mind almost unhinged at the sight of her sons, her five sons, dead, everyone of them.

Krishna was concerned about Bheema. He had gone alone. Krishna went to Yudhishthira and said: "Bheema is already upset by the death of the children and his friend. He is going in search of Aswatthama, the most ruthless killer. Aswatthama will stop at nothing. He may hurt Bheema. He has with him the powerful astra called Brahmaseersha. If he sends it against Bheema, our Bheema will be destroyed. Drona gave this astra to Arjuna. So his son wanted to learn it too. Drona did not want to teach it to him, as he did not trust him with it. But by persistent nagging Aswatthama managed to learn it. No one knows that Aswatthama has that astra with him. But I know. I will go in pursuit of Bheema. I will take Arjuna with me. My chariot is ready".

Krishna and Arjuna set out in haste to catch up with Bheema. They went far away from the neighbourhood of Kurukshetra. Finally they found Aswatthama hiding behind Vyaasa on the banks of the river Ganga. Bheema had already found him. He had his bow ready and he was challenging Aswatthama to fight with him. Arjuna and Krishna went with the speed of wind to the place where Bheema was stationed.

CHAPTER 4

KRISHNA'S CURSE

Aswatthama smiled at Bheema. His face had lost all the lustre it used to have. He now looked like a Nishada who kills animals and sells them. His face was ghastly. The great glow on the face of the son of Drona was gone. He looked so cruel and so hard. He smiled a sinister smile and, taking up a blade of grass in his hand, he invoked the great astra by name Brahmaseersha and sent it towards Bheema and Arjuna and said: "May the world be Pandava-less". From that blade of grass dense fumes were issuing forth. It began to throw out terrible flames and they were coming towards Bheema and Arjuna with fury and speed. Krishna's guess was right. Even as he was invoking the astra, Krishna said: "Arjuna, Arjuna, you can see what he is doing. He is invoking the Brahmaseershastra. You know it too. Your guru taught you the incantations for that in a moment of extreme pleasure. It was after he was released from the crocodile by you.

You have to send the astra to counteract this, if your brothers and you are to be saved. Be quick. The astra is on its way".

Arjuna was quicker than thought. The same astra was sent by him too. The two flames coursed along the sky, bent on destruction. The world was shaken by the power of the astras. Oceans began to dry up and the mountains were found to shake and tremble as though they were wisps of cotton caught in a gale. The two rishis Vyaasa and Narada came between the astras to prevent their colliding. If they had collided, the world would have come to an end. They stopped the two astras in the air with their hands: so great was the power of their penance. They said: "This is the one astra which should not be used on the earth. This has to be recalled immediately". Arjuna said: "I sent it to counteract that of that man Aswatthama. I had no intention of doing the world any harm. I will certainly obey your honoured selves". He recalled it. It was not an easy astra to withdraw. It needed a man who was given to severe austerities. Arjuna was able to recall it. But Aswatthama could not recall it. He was not pure. He was a murderer in cold blood. The astra would not obey him. It would not be recalled. He was terrified by the magnitude of his sins. He fell at the feet of the two rishis and said: "I am a great sinner. This astra is angry with me. It will not be withdrawn. I do not know what I am to do. I was mad with anger against the Pandavas and so I invoked the astra and I have said: 'May there be no more Pandavas on the earth'. I am helpless. I do not know what is to happen to the world. Please protect me. Please save me from the wrath of the astra".

The rishis said: "You have done a wicked thing. If this astra is baffled by a more powerful astra like the Brahmastra, then the land where this takes place will not have rain for twelve years. That is the reason why Arjuna did not use any other weapon now. You hate such a righteous person and think of destroying the sons of Pandu. Think kindly of them and withdraw the astra. As a recompense, remove the jewel from your head and give it to the Pandavas". Aswatthama did not like it. He said: "This jewel is a very precious gem. It will guard the wearer against all weapons, diseases and hunger. I cannot part with it. As for this astra, I am not able to withdraw it. I have aimed it at the Pandavas. If they are to live, then I will direct it against the wombs of all the women in their family. The astra will make the world Pandava-less that way". The astra was made to kill all the unborn children of the Pandavas. It was made to enter the womb of Uttara who was bearing the child of Abhimanyu.

Krishna was very angry with Aswatthama. He had never before been so angry. He said: "Aswatthama, you are the most contemptible

of all the creatures that have been born. You say that you have killed the son of Abhimanyu. *I will give life to that child*, and you will see it. You are doomed to live for ever. You will wander this earth, alone, without a single companion, without a loving word from anyone. You will see this child rule the world after he is installed on the throne of the Pauravas. He will rule the world for sixty years. You will see it". Aswatthama was made to part with the gem. He left the place and went away, alone, into the wide, wide world, to live for ever.

Dhritarashtra was literally sunk in woe. It was not possible for him to bear the immense pain caused by the death of all his sons. Sanjaya and Vidura tried their best to tell him about the necessity for courage. They tried their best to make him realise that this end had been predicted long ago. Sanjaya, always outspoken, said that the king had himself to blame for the dire calamity. The king was not offended by his words. He was humble. He admitted that it was all his fault. Vidura was very sorry for his foolish and inefficient brother. He tried to explain to him the secrets of birth and death, and the fact that the soul is indestructible. Vyaasa came and he finally coaxed the king to compose himself and go to the field of battle. Now that the war was over, the dead men had to be brought away from the field and cremated. The final funeral rites had to be performed. The gruesome visit to the battle-field was necessary.

All the women of the palace and all the women of the city walked with the blind king to see their dear ones on the field. Women whom even the sun had not seen, walked now in the streets of the city with their faces wet with tears, with their hair all unbound. Vidura remembered the day when the Pandavas left Hastinapura. He remembered the way in which Draupadi prophesied this when she walked out of the city, even like these women, fourteen years back. The brahmins were preceding the king reciting the holy Rudra hymns, even as Dhaumya had done on that memorable day fourteen years ago. It had all come true. Nemesis had overtaken the king and his sinful court. Vidura spoke not a word. He walked along with them silently. On the way they were met by Kripa, Kritavarma and Aswatthama, the sole survivors of the Kaurava army. They came to the king and queen and spoke words of comfort. They told them too about the massacre in the Pandava camp. Kripa said: "We are afraid of the Pandavas. They will be looking for us. We dare not stay any longer. We will take leave of you". They went away. Some distance from there they parted ways. They embraced each other and bade farewell. Kripa went to Hastinapura. Kritavarma went back to Dwaraka. Aswatthama went to the banks of the Ganga, to the hermitage of Vyaasa. It was there that Bheema found him later.

After this dismissal of Aswatthama, Bheema hurried to Draupadi with the gem in his hand. He gave it to her. Krishna told them all that had happened. Draupadi was pacified, and her grief abated slightly since the killer had been punished. She gave the gem to Yudhishthira and said that it was fit for the king and for no one else. Yudhishthira took it, to please Draupadi.

Chapter 5

THE EMBRACE OF DEATH

The Pandavas set out for Hastinapura. They had not seen the city since fourteen years ago. They were now going back to the city as rulers of the kingdom. Yudhishthira was the king. But their happiness was all destroyed because of Aswatthama. He had avenged the killing of Duryodhana. They were all sunk in woe. This mournful procession set out towards the city. Satyaki and Krishna were the two people who took good care of them. They heard that Dhritarashtra with the women of the palace and the women of the city had proceeded towards the battle-field, and they went there to meet them. The Pandavas saw the women on the field. Their lamentations greeted them. Yudhishthira went straight to Dhritarashtra and fell at his feet. He announced himself and his brothers. Dhritarashtra embraced him without affection. He thought of the Pandavas as the causes of the deaths of his sons. He could not welcome them with affection. But he knew how to behave himself in front of others. He spoke gentle words to Yudhishthira. His heart was full of hatred for Bheema. If he had been able to, he would have burnt him with his looks.

Dhritarashtra held out his arms to embrace Bheema. Bheema was proceeding towards him. Krishna stopped him with signs. Krishna hurried to the gymnasium and quickly brought the iron image of Bheema which Duryodhana had been using for his daily practice. Krishna placed it in front of Dhritarashtra. The old king embraced it. The moment he embraced it Dhritarashtra remembered that he had the killer of his sons in his arms. His arms now tightened about the iron figure. It went on getting tighter and tighter and the iron image was crushed to powder because of the powerful arms of the king. Bheema was looking on with horrified eyes. The king's body was wet with his own blood and his chest was full of blood too. The effort had made him faint. The king fell on the ground in a dead faint. Sanjaya revived

him. The king realised the gravity of the crime he had committed. He was sorry. He began to wail: "In my anger I have killed Bheema. I have killed Bheema, the son of my own brother. I have killed that child".

Krishna realised that all his anger and fury had abated. He came up to the king and said: "I knew how angry you were with Bheema. But, my lord, this is not Bheema you have crushed to powder. Bheema is safe. I knew your anger and your strength too. So I placed this image in front of you. It is an image of Bheema, made of iron. Duryodhana had it made. I placed it in front of you. Now that your hatred is all spent on this image, it is but right that you should show your affection to the sons of your own brother. Please set your mind on righteousness and do the right thing by them. They are also unhappy about the war. Please comfort them and be a father to them at least now". Dhritarashtra was cleansed of his evil thoughts. He wanted to be good to the sons of Pandu. He said: "I am now rid of all anger against the Pandavas. Please let me embrace them with real affection now". Bheema approached him. The king embraced him warmly and then Arjuna and then Nakula and lastly Sahadeva. They all sighed a sigh of relief.

But the worst was not over yet. They had to meet Gandhari. She had been very angry with them. She had decided to curse them. Knowing her thoughts, Vyaasa hurried to her side. He said: "Gandhari, my daughter, I know what is in your mind. It is not right. In your affection for your son, you are thinking sinful thoughts. Try to be forgiving. When your Duryodhana left for the battle-field he came to take leave of you. He said: 'Mother, say that I will be successful. If you say it, I will certainly win the war. Say it, mother'. But you said: 'Where there is Dharma, there will victory be.' Gandhari, you knew that he would not win. You knew that his cause was not righteous. Now, it is wrong to undo all the good you have done so far. You have been the most patient of all women. This anger of yours has to be abandoned. The Pandavas do not deserve it".

Gandhari listened in silence. She said: "Father, I am not angry. My mind was unhinged for a while by the death of my sons. But I am not angry with the Pandavas for fighting this war, and they did but do the right thing. It was my son who wanted war, and they had to fight. I know that. What makes me angry is not that. It is something more personal. What makes me angry is the fact that Bheema drank the blood of his own brother. He has killed my Duryodhana in an unfair fight. These things have made me angry. In his love for the kingdom, Bheema has done these things to my sons. That is burning me".

Hearing her words, Bheema came up to her. He was very soft and gentle in his speech, much to the amusement of Krishna. He said: "Mother, I did perform an unjust act during my fight with Duryodhana. I admit it. It was not possible to kill him. To protect myself from him, I had to do it. You must forgive me for this fault of mine. There was no fighter like your son in all the three worlds. I could never have killed him in a fair fight. Not even Indra. But Duryodhana was sinful. He harassed us for years. Much against his wish, Yudhishthira was made to fight this war. As for my breaking his thigh, I had a reason for it. I had taken an oath long ago that I would do it. Mother, if I had done it the moment he insulted Draupadi, you would not have been angry with me. You would even have said that what I did was right. But I was stopped by my brother. I had to wait all these years to fulfil my oath".

Gandhari said: "Bheema, you have praised my Duryodhana as the best fighter in all the three worlds. I will forgive you. But what about the drinking of the blood of my son Dussasana? The blood of your brother? That was a cruel thing to do! How will you explain that?" Bheema said: "Mother, of course it was a cruel act. I had sworn to do it in a moment of passion. I am sorely tried because of my quick temper. You must forgive this. Since I had sworn to do it, I did it. I did not swallow a single drop of my brother's blood. It did not pass beyond my lips and teeth. Radheya knew it. I had to do it because of my oath. It is an inhuman act. I know it. I ask you most humbly to forgive me these things, mother". Gandhari was pacified by the sweet and penitent words of Bheema. Krishna was trying not to smile at this new Bheema who was all apologies!

Gandhari turned her angry face on Yudhishthira now. She said: "Where is that king?" Hearing that voice, Yudhishthira knew how angry she was with him. He came up to her with folded palms. He announced himself: "Here I am, mother, the killer of your sons. I deserve your curses since I am the cause of the destruction of the entire world. I am waiting for your curse. I deserve it".

With very great effort, Gandhari reminded herself of the words of Vyaasa. She had tied her eyes with a silken scarf. She turned her face away in trying to control her mounting anger. She sighed like a serpent. In the end she succeeded in conquering herself. Righteousness won in the conflict between the love for her son and Dharma. The great Gandhari controlled herself and forgave them. When she was turning her face away, her eyes, though hidden by the scarf, happened to see the nails on the hands of Yudhishthira who was prostrate at her feet. Her angry glance fell on the nails, and it is said that they at once assumed a blue hue and lost their glow. Such was the power of

Gandhari. Seeing this, Arjuna fled from her and hid behind Krishna. Krishna laughed silently at the terror which this one woman could inspire in the heart of Arjuna, known all the world over by the name Jishnu. Krishna whispered the name into his ears, and was amused to see the blush spreading over his face.

CHAPTER 6

THE CURSE OF GANDHARI

Gandhari's anger had passed over their heads, even as the great Narayanastra had. She had been pacified too by their humility. She showed genuine affection and welcomed them to her arms. The Pandavas met their mother Kunti. Fourteen years had passed since they parted in sorrow. Kunti embraced all of them. She touched them again and again. She ran loving fingers over the scars and wounds which they had sustained during the war. She shed tears of joy at the thought that they were alive after the great war. She took the unfortunate Draupadi in her arms and tried to pacify her. Draupadi cried out: "Mother, all your grandsons are dead. Abhimanyu is dead, and all my sons are gone. It is so long since you saw them last, and you will never see them again. What is the use of this victory and this kingdom? I have no children". She sobbed into the breast of Kunti, and Kunti tried to speak words of comfort to the poor woman. They all followed the king and Gandhari to the battle-field. Gandhari spoke to Draupadi: "Look at me, my daughter, and comfort yourself. This is all the result of the workings of Fate. It is the end of the world. Vidura prophesied this long ago, and Krishna gave due warning when he came to Hastinapura. When a man is spurred by Fate he becomes deaf and blind. This had to happen and there is no use in grieving for the past. My dear child, do not grieve for your sons. They have reached the heavens. I am also like you. I have lost all my sons. Who is to comfort whom? The destruction of the entire race is because of me".

They walked towards the battle-field. Gandhari could see it all with her mind's eye. She had been granted that boon because of her severe penance. Even from a distance she could see the gruesome scene. She saw the wives of the warriors, or their mothers, falling on the dead forms of their dear ones and weeping bitter tears. Dhritarashtra was proceeding further. Gandhari spoke to Krishna. She showed him the dead forms of her sons and she showed the women who were her

daughters-in-law, lamenting the deaths of their lords. The scenes were heart-rending.

Gandhari went to the spot where Duryodhana was lying. She fell down in a dead faint. It was terrible to behold her grief. She regained her consciousness and wept bitter tears over the form of her dead son. She smoothed his brow and tried to untangle his locks which were matted with blood. Krishna stood by and spoke nothing. He heard her lamentations, and those of the wife of Duryodhana. Duryodhana's wife was torn between the bodies of her lord and her son. Gandhari showed him all the many scenes. He was made to see Uttara, the wife of Abhimanyu, weeping over the form of her beloved lord. They had been married but six months, and he was dead. Radheya was being mourned by his wife. Salya's wives were all there. It was altogether the most horrible scene that was ever enacted. Gandhari saw all this.

Suddenly Gandhari's anger flared up. She turned on Krishna. She said: "Krishna, all this is the result of your indifference. I am sure you could have averted this if you had wanted to. The anger between the Kauravas and the Pandavas could have been prevented by you. If you had been impartial to both the parties, if you had tried to, you could have prevented this annihilation. If it is true that I have performed penances, if I have any power, I will use all that to curse you for the ruin you have wrought on the House of the Kurus. I am cursing you. Because of your indifference, the Kauravas and the Pandavas were bent on destroying each other. The world was destroyed because of you. The enmity between cousins caused the destruction of the family. Even so, thirty-six years from today, your family, the entire family of the Vrishnis, will be destroyed by itself. The cousins will all fight and kill each other. The women of your House will weep, even as these women are weeping now. *This is the curse of Gandhari.*"

Krishna smiled his sweetest smile and said: "Mother, I know that I am the only person who is capable of destroying the entire House of the Vrishnis. They are indestructible. They can be destroyed only by themselves. Only a Vrishni can kill a Vrishni. No one else is capable of killing them. No god can hurt them. They have got to die at the hands of each other. I am glad your curse has solved the problem for me. I would have had to kill them, if you had not cursed me. Mother, I am indeed fortunate to have had your co-operation in the extinction of the House of the Vrishnis. You have really blessed us. There is also this to be said. Your anger has now found an outlet. You can never more be angry with Yudhishthira. I am prepared to do anything for the Pandavas. If my House has to die so that they may

live, I am only too happy to oblige. I am telling you again, mother, the Pandavas mean my very life to me".

The Pandavas had been listening to the curse of Gandhari. They had just passed through the dreadful experience of killing their cousins, and they were horrified to hear that the same fate was threatening the House of the Vrishnis. But Krishna was taking it all with a smile. He was doing it, so that they could live. The Pandavas felt humble in the presence of so much love.

Krishna spoke his mind to Gandhari. He said: "Rouse up your spirit of Dharma, mother. This sorrow is not good for you. This is because of you and not because of me. You were too fond of your son Duryodhana. His pride should have been curbed even at the outset. You knew your brother Sakuni. You should not have allowed him into your house. *You* were indifferent and not *I*. Duryodhana was encouraged to wallow in sin. All the elders in the court, and *you*, looked askance when he began to harass the Pandavas. You are responsible for all this, and your indifference is now being pushed on to my shoulders. You were there when I came to Hastinapura. You know how much I tried to coax Duryodhana to give up his hatred of the Pandavas. Yet you impute the sin of indifference to me. You have no right to do it. You knew about the house of lac. You could have taken some trouble and stopped your son from that sin. Your husband and you ruined that Duryodhana and now, when the world is destroyed because of him, you are trying to blame it on me.

"You are fond of your son. That is clouding your vision. Dhritarashtra is to blame for this. And you, such a good and righteous woman, allowed this injustice to flourish under your eyes. It is not right that you should blame it on me. I am not sorry for the death of the Kauravas. They have got more than they deserved. Your son deserved the worst hell for his sinful actions, and he has managed to reach heaven. He has cheated the Pandavas even when he died. But I am glad about it in a way, since it will comfort you. They have gone to heaven because of your goodness and your penance. You must not mourn the death of your sons who are with the gods now. Throw away this grief, mother. I ask you most humbly, throw it away. Just now, when you saw the form of your son you said: 'Duryodhana came to me just when he set out for the battle. He stood with folded palms before me and said: "In this battle between cousins, you must wish me success. If you say it, I am sure to win". I knew that he had launched an unnatural war. I told him: "My child, where Dharma is, there victory is. You are fighting an unjust war. You cannot win. But I bless you. I say that you will fight gloriously and reach the heavens. You cannot win, my son. But you will have a glorious death".' You told me all this just

now. You were not sorry when you said that to your child because you are such a righteous woman. And now, because of this sorrow, you are forgetting Dharma and trying to blame it on me. I would not have been surprised if your husband had said it. But you, mother, you are different. You can face Truth. Come, shake off this sorrow". Gandhari was speechless after this tirade from Krishna.

CHAPTER 7

"RADHEYA WAS MY SON"

Dhritarashtra appointed Vidura, Sanjaya and Dhaumya to make all arrangements for the cremation of the great heroes who were lying on the battle-field. It was all over soon. Yudhishthira, accompanied by Dhritarashtra and all the others, turned towards the banks of the river Ganga to offer the funeral oblations to the dead. They were all there: also Gandhari, Kunti and Draupadi. Now the men laid aside all their jewels and silks. They were wearing the simplest of clothes. Their immense chests were covered by thin upper cloths. The dismal procession wended its way slowly towards the banks of the river Ganga.

Kunti's condition was pitiable. Three days back Radheya was killed by her Arjuna. There was great celebration in the Pandava camp. She had heard about it from Sanjaya. When Sanjaya was telling Dhritarashtra about the war, about the death of Radheya, she heard it. Her heart was burning with grief. She could not tell anyone about it. She could not talk about the wound in her heart. She had to be silent. Today, on the battle-field, she saw the dead form of her first-born. She would not allow herself to faint. Krishna was watching all the while. She looked at Radheya and she saw his wife weeping over her lord. She saw that too and still she did not speak. Now, at the end of all this, she was walking with all of them to see the funeral oblations paid on the banks of the sacred river Ganga. It was the same Ganga who took her son away from her years back. Still Ganga flowed as placidly as she did on that memorable day when she set the wooden box afloat on the bosom of the river. It looked like yesterday. Kunti was watching the men give their final offerings to the departed souls. Radheya had no son to do it for him. They were all dead. He was still an orphan as he was on the day she had abandoned him. Her heart was ready to burst with the great sorrow. She burned with self-condemnation for the great injustice she had done to her child.

Kunti squared her shoulders. She set her lips in a firm line. She had to do it. She owed at least this to Radheya. She walked with firm steps to her son Yudhishthira.

Yudhishthira had just finished his offerings to the sons of Draupadi and all the others. Arjuna's tears were still in his eyes. He had just made the offerings for his dear beloved Abhimanyu. Now Kunti would do something which would make all this pale into just nothing. She went to Yudhishthira and placed her hand on his back. He turned round and said: "Yes, mother? What is it? Why did you call me?" Kunti had to swallow hard to prevent a sob from escaping her lips. She said: "There is still another person left. You have to make the offerings for him also, my son". Yudhishthira looked at her. Her eyes were red with unshed tears. All the people who had assembled there paused and looked at the scene between mother and son. The brothers of Yudhishthira crowded around them and stood with their brows knit to guess who this other person could be. Krishna, the one man who knew, stood and watched Kunti with great compassion in his eyes. She had kept the secret well. She had not announced it during the war. She was silent even after Radheya died, because it would have broken the heart of Yudhishthira. He would have stopped fighting and gone back to the forest. What Kunti was doing now was the right thing. Krishna listened.

Yudhishthira said: "One person more? I do not understand. I remember the dead only too well. Surely I am not such an ingrate as to forget those who died for me! Who is this person to whom an offering by me is due?" Kunti said: "It is Radheya. You must make the offerings for him too". Yudhishthira was astounded. He said: "Radheya? But mother, why should I do it for Radheya? He is a sutaputra. The funeral rites must be performed by his father since his sons are dead. I am a kshatriya. Why do you ask me to do it for a suta? For Radheya the sutaputra, our arch-enemy? Why should I do it, mother? Please tell me. Why do you look so unhappy?" A moment passed. Kunti was dumb with the agony in her heart. She took a deep breath and said: "Yudhishthira, you must do it because Radheya is a kshatriya and not a sutaputra." "Not a sutaputra! Radheya not a sutaputra!" shouted all of them: all at the same time. The cry was taken up by everyone there. Radheya was a kshatriya! Radheya was not a sutaputra! Everyone was amazed to hear it. Yudhishthira said: "But, mother, you knew not a thing about Radheya! How do you know that he is a kshatriya? Then you must know who he is. Why should I offer the funeral oblations for Radheya? I am puzzled by your words. Tell me, mother, who was the father of the great Radheya?" Kunti said: "Radheya was the son of Surya. Radheya's

mother was a young girl. Surya gave her this child. It was born with the Kavacha and the Kundalas. His mother was afraid of the censure of the world. You see, she was a maiden in her father's house. So she had to keep the secret buried in her heart. She placed the child in a wooden box and set it afloat on this same river: this Ganga. The child was taken up by Atiratha and he gave it to his wife Radha. That is how he got the name Radheya, and that was the name he loved. He would not take any other name. His mother was a princess. She did this injustice to her first-born. She has several children but her heart is empty because of this".

Yudhishthira and all the others were listening to this recital. Everything else was forgotten in the excitement of listening to the wonderful story. Yudhishthira said: "Mother, who is the mother of Radheya? Who is that woman who was so heartless that she could abandon her child in the great river Ganga the moment it was born? Who is the woman who ruined the life of that great man? You must be knowing her since you are telling us all the details of the crime. Who is she, mother?"

All eyes were turned on her. Kunti looked at all of them. She looked at Krishna. He was looking at her with infinite pity in his eyes. Kunti looked straight into the eyes of Yudhishthira and said: "That woman is still alive. I am that woman. Radheya was my son: my first-born". She fell down in a dead faint.

Vidura hurried to her side even as he did on the day of the tournament when she fainted at the sight of Radheya. Yudhishthira could not think at all. He stood staring at all of them. He kept repeating: "Radheya is my elder brother and we have killed him!" He looked at Arjuna. Arjuna rushed to him. He cried out: "What have I done, my lord? What have I done? How can I live after this? I have killed my brother! My brother, I have killed him!" Arjuna could not stand up. He sat down on the ground and he was shouting as one bereft of his senses: "I have killed my brother and I gloated over my brother's death!" He fell down in a faint. Krishna came to him and Yudhishthira. Yudhishthira's grief was dreadful. He was trembling like a man with an ague. His eyes became blood-shot. Bheema sat down beside Arjuna. He was too stunned to think. He was like a child which had suddenly become old.

Bheema thought of the day of the tournament. He remembered the moment when he had just discovered that Radheya was a sutaputra. Bheema had said: "Listen. You, a sutaputra, are not fit to be killed by Arjuna. You are not fit to hold a bow in your hand. Get thee hence, and take up a whip which will suit you better". Bheema remembered Duryodhana's words. He had said: "As for this young man,

it makes me pity you for your lack of understanding. He is full of the qualities that are found in a kshatriya and only in a kshatriya. Can you not see that a tiger can never be born of a poor meek deer? Can you not *feel* that he is a kshatriya? I have made him king of the Angas. But I know that he does not deserve this. He deserves to be lord of the entire world. He is born to be great. You are not good enough or great enough to recognize him". Duryodhana's words burned into his mind now. Yes, they were not great enough to recognize the greatness of Radheya. Bheema was sobbing as if his entire frame were shattered. He could not speak a word. There was dumb misery and nothing else. Nakula thought of the duel he fought with Radheya; he remembered the words of Radheya. He had said: "Some day you will be proud of this duel you fought with me. Some day you will be proud of the fact that Radheya insulted you". Yes, that moment of humiliation would now be the most treasured moment in his life. It was not possible for Sahadeva to forget Radheya and his fight with him. He was remembering the sneer on his lips, and his unruffled manner. The Pandavas were prostrate with grief.

Kunti was revived with water and other things. For the first time in his life, Yudhishthira did not pay any attention to his mother. He could not look at the woman who had done this injustice to Radheya and to the Pandavas. He went and sat with Arjuna and Krishna. Yudhishthira remembered the day when Radheya died. He remembered every moment of that day. He remembered calling Radheya 'sutaputra'. Yudhishthira turned to his mother. He asked her: "Did Radheya know about it? Did he know who he was?" "Yes", said Krishna. Yudhishthira turned his eyes on Krishna. All the Pandavas looked at Krishna. "Did you know about it, Krishna?" asked Yudhishthira. "Yes" was the reply. It was not possible for them to speak a single word after that. Radheya knew that he was not a sutaputra. He knew that he was the son of Surya and Kunti. And yet he allowed his own brothers to taunt him with that name. Yudhishthira beat his head in futile anger. He said: "When I heard that Radheya was dead, I ran to the battle-field to see if he was really dead. I was so happy to see him dead. Mother, how could you do this to us, loving us as you did?"

It was only now that Yudhishthira saw his mother's face. She looked so unhappy. He did not want to speak a word more. She had suffered enough. Yudhishthira went and stood on the banks of the river Ganga. It looked as though the funeral oblations were being paid with just the tears of Yudhishthira. The death of Abhimanyu and the death of the sons of Draupadi were forgotten in this great calamity which had befallen them. They had killed their brother. That was the only thought that was in their minds as the Pandavas came away

from the banks of the river Ganga. The procession wended its way towards the city. Gandhari, Kunti and Draupadi were sharing the same grief. They had lost their sons and they were inconsolable. Krishna walked along with them. He left them all to their grief. Krishna and Satyaki were walking a few steps behind the procession.

CHAPTER 8

YUDHISHTHIRA'S UNHAPPINESS

They had to stay away from the city for the duration of a month. They could not go back to the city until the funeral rites had been performed. All of them stayed in temporary houses built on the banks of the Ganga. Vyaasa, Narada and many other rishis came to see Yudhishthira. Narada spoke to him. He said: "Why are you plunged in woe? By the grace of Krishna and with the help of your valiant brothers and the Panchalas, you are now lord of the world. Your years of suffering are ended. I am happy to offer you my felicitations on your success".

Yudhishthira's grief broke out. He said: "My lord, I am not destined to be happy. All the happiness that ought to have been ours is gone because we have been told by our mother that Radheya was our brother. How could this have been allowed to happen? My mother tells me that she met him once before the war. She asked him to come to her: and to his brothers. But he would not. Krishna had asked him. But he would not let down his friend and master Duryodhana. Depending on Radheya, he had begun the war. It was against the nature of my brother to be disloyal to his king and master and friend. He suffered agonies when he knew that the Pandavas were his brothers. But he would not swerve from the path of duty. Such a man was our brother, and we have killed him. I was happy when he was killed. I called him a sutaputra when I fought a duel with him. He defeated me and he insulted me. What dread fate is this, my lord, that separated him from us? He knew all the time that I was his brother, and he did not want to let us know.

"I remember the day in the court in Hastinapura. Draupadi was being insulted by all of them: by Radheya more than the others. I was wild with him. I was standing with my head hung down in shame. I turned my eyes towards him. I could not look up. I just looked at his feet and all my anger vanished. I could not be angry with him.

His feet were like the blessed feet of my mother. I was intrigued by the resemblance. For years I have always remembered this, and again and again I have tried to solve this teasing problem. How could the feet of Radheya, the sutaputra, resemble those of my mother? My lord, when I realize now why his feet were like those of my mother, my heart is ready to break into a million flinders. How can I be happy after killing this great man, this Radheya who should have been the lord of this Kuru kingdom? I cannot find any solace in anything.

"My mother tells me that he gave her a boon of his own accord. He told her that he would not kill any of the Pandavas except Arjuna. He just had to fight that duel with Arjuna. That was the only way he could please Duryodhana. I now realize why he did not kill Bheema on the day when Jayadratha fell. He had Bheema at his mercy. He went away without killing him. But he had to insult him. That night he met Sahadeva in a duel. The next day, Nakula. On the last day of his life he met me in a duel. We were all allowed to live. He did not kill us because he would not. What a noble and loving brother we had, and Arjuna killed him when he was not ready to fight! I can never forgive myself for this outrage. We have been the most unrighteous people that fought in the war".

Narada comforted him. He said that Radheya could not have been killed by anyone. It was the curse of two brahmins and the interference of Indra that made the killing of Radheya possible. He told the Pandavas the story of Radheya's life in the full detail of all its tragic splendour. It was the story of a noble soul which purified all those who were fortunate enough to have been associated with him. It chastened the Pandavas. It made them humble. It made them realize that the ways of Providence are mysterious. But the grief never left their hearts. It was a raw wound which would never heal.

Yudhishthira could never forgive his mother for the injustice done to Radheya and to all of them. He cursed all womenkind. He said that no woman would be able to keep secrets from then on. It was because Kunti kept the secret so well that this calamity had happened. There was no way of comforting the Pandavas.

Yudhishthira lost all interest in the kingdom that they had won after so much pain and bloodshed. He almost decided to abandon everything and go back to the forest. It was not possible to convince him that it was a wrong attitude. He would sit and mourn the death of all those who had been killed in the war. He blamed himself for everything now. Bheema, Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadeva, Draupadi, all tried so often to convince him that his attitude was wrong: that he should not be so depressed. But it was all to no purpose. They were nearly desperate. Yudhishthira was sunk in woe. Vyaasa, Narada

and so many others made him realize that it was all wrong. Yudhishthira began to throw off the mantle of sorrow gradually. It was not easy for Vyaasa to change his attitude. But finally Yudhishthira came to realize his duty as a king. He was made to see that a man who is a king has no right to his personal griefs. He belonged to the people. He was not allowed to have an individuality of his own. To the people the king was god: but to the king his subjects represented god. It was his duty to rule them well. Beyond that, a king had no existence. He had to live just for the sake of the people. He must be a father to them. It was their due.

Yudhishthira realized all this. He said: "My mind is not clouded any more, my lord. I have passed through the dark valley and have come out into the sunlight. Please teach me the rules of conduct that a king should follow. Please tell me the rules of governing a kingdom. I do not know many of these things. It is up to you all to guide me in the right path. I have taken upon myself this great responsibility. I must know everything about ruling the kingdom. I want to do it as well as my ancestors did. Please teach me". Vyaasa smiled happily and said: "Yudhishthira, I am happy to see you take so much trouble about the ruling of the kingdom. It is laudable. But you are asking the wrong person. I am a man who has never ruled. I am one who has nothing to do with the kingdom on the earth. I am ignorant in these matters. I suggest that you ask your grandfather. He is the greatest authority on these matters. Ganga, when she took him with her, wanted to fit him for the role he was to play—a king of the Lunar race. He was to have succeeded Santanu. He was taught political science by Brihaspati and Sukra, the divine preceptors. There is no one to equal Devavrata in this. He was fitted out to play a role which he could never play, thanks to the selfishness of his father. He has never had a chance to tell anyone about all that. Devavrata has lived in heaven before he came down to the earth. He has been in the company of gods. I will tell you the greatness of your grandfather.

"Brihaspati was his tutor in political science. Ganga, the favourite of the gods, is his dear mother. They took so much trouble to make the son of Ganga well versed in all that a king should know. Sukra, the guru of the gods and the asuras, taught him the rules of conduct. Bhargava was his tutor in archery. The vedas and the vedangas were taught him by Vasishtha. As for his knowledge of renunciation, Markandeya taught him that. Devavrata knows the secret beyond the Veil of Death. It will be your good fortune if you can hear the great Bheeshma talk on all these things. He will be happy to tell you. Nothing will please a teacher so much as a willing and humble disciple. Go now to that great man and ask him. Go to Bheeshma who has been

spending his last days on a bed of arrows". Yudhishthira said: "My lord, how can I go and stand in the presence of that great man? I am the cause of the destruction of my cousins. Having committed such a sin, how can I have the courage to enter his presence?" Krishna said: "Do not be so sensitive about what happened, Yudhishthira. It is known to all that Fate was responsible for this, and not you. Go to Bheeshma: listen to the words of Vyaasa. It is for the good of the kingdom which you are to rule for many years more. Bheeshma is a great man. He knew the future of the Kauravas. Do not have any doubts about it. Listen to Vyaasa". Taking the advice of all of them, Yudhishthira decided to go to his grandfather for instructions on how to rule his kingdom.

Chapter 9

THE CROWNING OF YUDHISHTHIRA

The month was over. They could now go back to Hastinapura. The mind of Yudhishthira had realized peace. He was not unhappy anymore. The days and nights he had spent with the wise rishis had given him SANTI, peace, which he had been longing for, all these years. He now understood the true value of things. His mind was cured of the fever of unrest, and he was happy. A sensitive man like Yudhishthira could not reconcile himself to ruling the kingdom which he had won after wading through a river of blood: the blood of his cousins. It was only after the comforting company of the great rishis that he realized his real position. He was happy now. He was almost looking forward to taking up the duties of a ruler. Yudhishthira wanted to fit himself for this role. The suggestion of Vyaasa appealed to him. He decided to leave for Hastinapura.

They all set out for the capital city. With the old king Dhritarashtra in the lead, they began their journey to the city. It was a magnificent procession. The city was reached soon. The people saw the new king Yudhishthira in a chariot drawn by sixteen white bullocks. Bheema was holding the reins in his hands. Arjuna was holding the white umbrella over his head. Nakula and Sahadeva were holding the chamaras on either side of the king. It was a splendid spectacle. The people had had time to forget their recent woe. A month had gone by. They were happy to welcome the king to Hastinapura. In a chariot following that of the king Yudhishthira, was seated Yuyutsu, the only

surviving son of Dhritarashtra. This was followed by the chariot of Krishna who had Satyaki with him. The women of the royal house were carried in palanquins carried by bearers. There was a grand and impressive procession of horses and many elephants and footmen. It was a happy day for everyone.

Yudhishthira, preceded by Dhritarashtra and followed by the others, entered the magnificent sabha of the Kuru kings. He was honoured by all the citizens and brahmins who recited verses blessing the Pandavas. Krishna led Yudhishthira to the throne. Krishna seated him on the illustrious throne of the Pauravas. Krishna's eyes were raining tears. His promise had been fulfilled today. He had taken an oath that he would place Yudhishthira on the throne, and he had achieved this great task. Jewelled seats were placed facing the throne. Satyaki and Krishna took their seats. Bheema and Arjuna seated themselves on either side of the king. On ivory seats by the side of these brothers, were seated Nakula and Sahadeva. Kunti was seated along with Sahadeva, her favourite child. They shared the same seat. Individual seats were provided for Dhritarashtra and Gandhari. Vidura and Yuyutsu were seated by their side.

The king had been crowned. There were musical instruments making sweet music. The brahmins chanted the Vedas. It was a thrilling moment. The chief men of the city came to the presence of the king and spoke formal words of welcome. Yudhishthira was looking like the moon in the midst of stars. He replied in suitable terms and then spoke. He said: "I have been greatly honoured by the citizens. I will try to the best of my ability to be a good king. I am hoping that my uncle will still be the king as he has been all these years. He is our father. He is the father of this kingdom. I will be just his servant and I will try to assist him in ruling the kingdom. My brothers will all help me". Yudhishthira dismissed all the citizens after honouring them duly.

Yudhishthira crowned Bheema as the yuvaraja: the heir-apparent. Vidura was appointed the minister. He had the charge of the defence of the kingdom. He was also the personal counsellor to the king. Sanjaya was made to take charge of the finance of the government. Nakula was to take charge of the army and its maintenance. Arjuna was the commander of the army. He was in charge of foreign affairs. He had to defend the kingdom from foreign invasions. Dhaumya continued to be the high-priest. Sahadeva was the personal protector of the king. He had to be with him always. Yuyutsu was asked to manage the several provinces and also to attend to the personal wants of the old king Dhritarashtra. Krishna was watching with admiration the efficiency of the king.

Chapter 10

BHEESHMA ON THE BED OF ARROWS

The final funeral rites for the departed heroes were performed in a very grand manner. After it was all over, Yudhishthira came to Krishna and stood before him with his palms folded. He said: "My lord, you have given me back my kingdom. For my sake you have done so many tasks. In your affection for me, you have played the role of a man: you, who must be worshipped as the Eternal Soul. You are the Lord of lords, and you have pretended to be a man and to be affected by the joys and sorrows which troubled us. With us you have wept and with us you have smiled. You have shown us the way to Truth and you have been our guide. I do not know what to say. My heart is full of emotion. I have always followed your advice. I fall at your feet and wash them with my tears. That is all I can do in return for all that you have done for us". Krishna lifted up Yudhishthira. He spoke sweet and gentle words to him and to all the brothers.

The next day, in the morning, Yudhishthira came to the presence of Krishna. He found him to be in a thoughtful mood. Seeing the king, Krishna smiled at him and spoke to him. The king said: "What makes you so thoughtful, Krishna?" Krishna said: "I was thinking of your grandfather, Bheeshma. He has reached the last few days of his life on this earth. You wanted to learn so much from him. I was thinking of going to see him. He is calling me in his mind. I wanted to ask you to accompany me. That was the reason for my abstraction". Yudhishthira said: "We will do what you suggest". Krishna looked at Satyaki and said: "Satyaki, ask Daruka to prepare my chariot. You must also prepare yourself. We must go to the field where the Kuru ancient is lying on a bed of arrows".

Krishna's chariot was ready. Daruka came and announced it. The entire group left for the field. In several chariots they went to the battle-field. They abandoned their chariots and went on foot to the presence of the great Bheeshma. He looked like the setting sun. Krishna went forward and spoke to Bheeshma. He was feeling so unhappy to see the great man suffering so much pain and agony. He sat by his side and spoke gentle words. He said: "How are you faring, my lord? The power you have to hold death at bay is not given to me. Your strength of will is amazing. If a needle point pricks me I cannot bear the pain. How can you bear the pain caused by a thousand arrows which are lodged in your body? There is no one

like you in this world. You are the home of all knowledge. You have been the pupil of Brihaspati, Sukra, Vasishtha and Markandeya. You are the store-house of all wisdom. You are the greatest hero. You have always followed the path of righteousness. You are the foremost of the Vasus. You are the greatest man that has ever graced the world of men. You must now pacify Yudhishthira who is grieved because he was the cause of the death of his cousins. He has been pacified by Vyaasa himself, and he wants to rule the kingdom as well as his ancestors did. You must teach him all that you know. You must make him shake off this sorrow and rule the kingdom properly. You are the only person who can help him".

Bheeshma heard the words of Krishna. He raised his head a little and looked at Krishna. A smile hovered at the corner of his lips. He said: "My lord, you are the Eternal Soul that pervades this universe. You are the home of all knowledge and all wisdom. Tell me what I should do. I do not know how long I will have to live. I have lost count of time. I have cleared my debt to Satyavati. I am waiting for the time when the sun's chariot changes its direction and proceeds to the north. I want you to tell me when I can see your Viswaroopa. I am impatient to see your form, my lord". Krishna said: "Bheeshma, you have sixty-five days more to live on this world. I will be by your side when you give up this bondage to reach your home. When you go, all that immense knowledge will go with you, and no one will be able to get it. I want you to talk to Yudhishthira about all that you know. You can do it".

Bheeshma said: "Krishna, you are trying to laugh at me. Your words are full of love but when you, the home of all knowledge, when you are here, how can I dare to talk about Dharma and conduct to Yudhishthira? If I talk, it will be impertinent. It will be like a student trying to talk in the presence of his guru. It is wrong, my Lord." Krishna smiled and said: "You are very modest. It is becoming that you should speak so humbly of yourself. But I want you to talk to Yudhishthira". Bheeshma said: "Krishna, I am weak with my wounds. My pain is unbearable. My memory has become clouded. You are asking me to remember things which I learnt when I was in heaven with my mother. I do not think I have strength in my body or in my mind to undertake this task which you want to assign to me". Krishna said: "I will grant you a boon. This pain and this weakness will not be there till you die. Your memory will be unclouded. Your perception will be as keen as the blade of a sword. You will be able to unravel the most intricate knots of the mysteries of the universe. You will know all that there is to know". The heavens rained flowers on Bheeshma and Krishna when these words were spoken. Krishna got up after

saluting Bheeshma. He took leave of him saying, "We will return tomorrow".

The night passed pleasantly for all of them. Krishna slept a dreamless sleep after so many days. Early in the morning he sent Satyaki to Yudhishthira. Satyaki went to the king and said: "Krishna is ready to see the great Bheeshma. He wants to know if you are ready to leave for the field". At once Yudhishthira and his brothers set out for the field, accompanied by Krishna and Satyaki. They hurried to the presence of Bheeshma. He now looked as glorious and fresh as the rising sun. Krishna sat by his side and asked him how he was. Bheeshma said: "Krishna, I am free of all pain and the agony from the moment you granted me the boon. I am feeling alert mentally too. I am feeling immensely pleased with myself. But Krishna, I want to ask a question of you. Why do you want *me* to give this discourse on the dharma of a kshatriya? Why do you not speak to Yudhishthira *yourself*? I want to know the reason for this".

Krishna smiled a gentle smile and said: "You are right. I can tell him everything. But I have decided to bring *you* everlasting glory. I want the world to remember you always: for ever and ever. The world of men will hereafter take your words to be as sacred as the Vedas. Every action of man in the days to come will be dictated by the rules set down by you. A man is said to live in this world as long as his fame lives. I want you to live for ever. That is why I am asking you to speak".

Bheeshma's tears flowed slowly and silently. He could not speak. This love Krishna had for him was too sacred for him to talk about it. He composed himself and said: "Tell Yudhishthira to ask me any question he wants. I am ready to answer him". Krishna said: "Yudhishthira feels guilty. He does not dare to come to your presence since he thinks that he is the cause of the destruction of all the kshatriyas and his own cousins". Bheeshma smiled tenderly and called Yudhishthira to him. He placed his old hands on his head and said: "My child, the duty of a kshatriya is to fight and kill. You had to kill. You have been a real kshatriya. You must not grieve for having done your duty. Come now, Krishna tells me that your understanding is clouded because of the many doubts you have about true conduct. I hear that you want to learn the art of ruling the kingdom well. I will tell you everything, my child. It was taught to me by the great masters, and I will impart it all to you with the grace of this Lord who is pleased to walk on this earth calling himself Krishna".

Chapter 11

TALKS ON THE DHARMA OF A KING

Yudhishthira asked: "It has been said by the wise that kingly duties constitute the highest science. Please tell me about the duties of a king."

Bheeshma was immensely pleased with the humility and eagerness of Yudhishthira. He smiled at him and said: "My child, I am only too eager to tell you all that you want to know. A king's first duty is to worship the gods and the brahmins. A king should essentially be a man of action. You might have heard from many that destiny rules a king. It is a fallacy in reasoning if you think so. Destiny does play a part. I grant that. But without action a king can never help destiny to play her part. Destiny is powerful but action is equally powerful. Both are potent. But to me, it seems that action is the more potent of the two. It is action which shapes the destiny.

"The next, or rather, the next equally important duty of a king, is Truth. If you want to inspire confidence in the minds of your subjects, you should always be truthful.

"All accomplishments find a home in a king. His behaviour should be above reproach. Self-restraint, humility and righteousness are qualities which you have to look for in a king if he has to be successful. He should have his passions under perfect control.

"Justice should be the second nature of a king. There are three more things which a king should cultivate. He should know how to conceal his own weaknesses carefully. By weakness is meant the weaknesses in his kingdom. He should take the trouble to find out the weaknesses in his enemies and he should be very careful to be secretive about his plans.

"A king's conduct should be straightforward. Another danger for a king is mildness. He should not be too mild. He will then be disregarded. The subjects will not have enough respect for him and his words. Again, he should avoid the other extreme. He should not be too fierce because then the subjects will be afraid of him, and that is not a happy state of affairs.

"A king should know the art of choosing servants. He should have compassion as part of his mental make-up, but he should guard against too forgiving a nature. The lowest of men will take advantage of him and his nature if they are considered weak.

"Alertness is a great necessity for a king. He should study his foes and his friends too, incessantly.

"A king must consider that his first duty is to his subjects. He should guard them as a mother guards the child in her womb. Will any mother have thoughts of pleasing herself when her child is in her womb? All her thoughts will be bent only on the child and its welfare. Even so, a king should subordinate his desires and wishes to those of his subjects. Their welfare should be his only concern.

"A king should be careful not to place implicit confidence in anyone. His innermost thoughts must be concealed from even his nearest and dearest and he should not tell anyone about his decisions.

"A king should be wise in dealing with six problems. The first is making peace with a foe who is stronger. The next consideration is making war on one who is equal to him in strength. Invading the country of one who is weaker in his next problem. He should use his discrimination when he makes a decision about these things. He should be prepared to seek protection in his fort if his position is weak. The most important work of a king is to cause dissensions among the chief office-bearers in his enemy's country. He should have clever spies at his service and find out the secrets of the enemy. He should bribe and cajole the officers of the enemy and win them over to his side.

"A king should be pleasant in speech. He should have about him men who are all like him in nature and in noble qualities. The only difference between the king and his officers should be the white umbrella.

"The best king is one whose subjects live in freedom and happiness as they do in their father's house. Peace will be theirs, and contentment. There will then be no wickedness, no pretence, no dishonesty and no envy.

"The very core of a king's duty is the protection of his subjects and their happiness. It is not easy. To secure the happiness of his people he should use diverse methods.

"A king should be proficient in the art of choosing honest men to hold important offices. Skill, cleverness and truth are all three necessary in a king. Old and fallen buildings and living-houses should be renovated by him if he has to win the good opinion of his subjects. He should know how to use his powers in inflicting corporal punishments and fines on miscreants.

"The king should remember that his treasury should always be full. Supervision of the work of all his officers should be done by the king himself. He should never trust the guardians of the city or fort implicitly.

"He must produce disloyalty among the people in a hostile country and he must have friends and allies there.

"He should amass troops, and this should be done in secret. A king can never protect his kingdom by candour and by simplicity. A king should be both candid and crooked. He must employ crookedness and wrong acts when he wants to subdue the enemy. All these things should be concealed behind a candid and open exterior."

Yudhishthira: "How did the word 'RAJAN' come into use when a king is addressed? A king is like any other human being on the earth. His body and limbs are like those of anyone else. His understanding, his senses, are similar to those of many others. He has the same joys and griefs, the same number of years to live on the earth, like anybody else. How then did it happen that he is considered different? This world is made up of men who are far superior to him in intelligence, bravery and all accomplishments. And yet, this one man rules the others: though they are superior to him. Why should it be the rule that one man is worshipped by all the others?"

Bheeshma: "I will tell you. In the beginning there was no king. There was no punishment. These two were not needed then. Men were all righteous and each man protected the other. As time passed on, however, the hearts of men began to be invaded by errors. Once error enters the heart, the mind gets clouded and the sense of right and wrong begins to wane. It was even so with the men of distant times.

"*Covetousness* was the first guest in their hearts. When covetousness came into life, men began to want things which did not belong to them. The next passion to be born was *lust*. Lust can never exist alone. It has to have a companion and so *wrath* came into existence. As soon as these terrible passions found places in the hearts of men, righteousness had to beat a hasty retreat. Along with this confusion, happened another great calamity. The Vedas disappeared. Righteousness was completely lost to the world. The gods were then overcome with fear. They went to Brahma Pitamaha and said: 'Look on the world you have created, my lord! It is threatened with destruction. Please save it and save us!'

"Brahma assured them that he would find a way. He then composed a treatise composed of a hundred thousand lessons. He treated of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. He dealt with them in great detail. He formulated the rules for chastisement. The main features of this treatise on chastisement dealt with punishment of two kinds: open and secret punishment. It treated of conservation of wealth by traders and merchants, growth of penance of the ascetics, destruction of thieves and wicked men. There was a branch dealing with all the religious observances, and another dealt with the extensive subject of legislation and the behaviour that is expected of counsellors, of spies, of secret agents, envoys, and conciliation. All the many ways and means by

which men may be prevented from deviating from the path of righteousness and honesty were described in it.

"After composing it Brahma said: 'For the good of the world and for the establishment and propagation of Dharma, Artha and Kama I have composed this. Assisted by chastisement this will protect the world. Men are mostly led by chastisement and so this treatise will be called *Dandaneeti*.'

"It was studied and abridged by several of the gods, the first of them being Sankara. Finally, when it was to be given to the world, Sukra of great wisdom thought of the brevity of the life of men on earth and made the work much shorter. It contained just a thousand lessons. The gods then appeared before Vishnu and said: 'Lord! indicate to us a man on the world who deserves to be superior to the rest'

"Narayana said: 'I will enter the body of one man and he, as well as all those who are born in his line, will be lords of the world'.

"There was a king called Vena. From his right arm was born a man who was like a second Indra in his looks and godliness. He was born with a coat of mail and all the weapons. He was proficient in all the arts and the Vedas. The rishis made him the ruler of the world. Sukra was his priest. There was current among men the feeling that he was the eighth son of Vishnu himself.

"His name was Prithu. He made the surface of the earth level. Vishnu and the deities assembled to crown Prithu king. The earth took a form and came to him with tributes of gems and jewels. Prithu milked the earth in the form of a cow and made her yield seven kinds of crops for the food of all living creatures. He made all men regard Dharma as the foremost of all things.

"Because he pleased all the people he was called 'RAJAN'. Because he healed the wounds of afflicted people he was called 'KSHATRIYA'. And again, because the earth became celebrated for the prevalence of virtue during his reign, she was called 'PRITHIVI'.

"Vishnu entered the body of that monarch. A pure man, when his punya becomes exhausted, descends from heaven to earth and is born as a king. Such a person is indeed great and is a portion of Vishnu on earth. He has a heritage of divine intelligence and he is superior to all the others. He is established by the gods and he is not to be slighted. This is the reason why the world cannot command him but he can command the world. This is why the multitude has to obey his words of command though he is like anybody else."

Yudhishthira: "What are the principal duties of the subjects?"

Bheeshma: "Their first duty is to elect a king and perform his coronation. For the sake of the treasury, the subjects should give one fiftieth of their animals and precious metals and a tenth part of their

grains. From among them they should choose those who are proficient in the use of weapons, and help the king in the maintenance of the army. A fourth part of the merits of the people will go to the king and a fourth part of their evil also. A disciple behaves with humility in the presence of his preceptor. Even so a subject should humble himself before his king. A king who is honoured by his subjects will naturally be respected and feared by his foes."

Yudhishthira: "What other special duties should a king discharge?"

Bheeshma: "A king should first know how to bring himself under subjugation. When he has achieved this he should then try to subdue his foes. The conquest of the five senses is considered to be the greatest victory. It is only such a king that is capable of conquering his enemies.

"A king should have an immense number of soldiers in his forts, cities, frontiers and all important spots.

"A king's thoughts, actions, decisions and spies should be kept secret from everyone, specially the enemy. His spies should look like imbeciles. Or they should seem as though they are blind and deaf. They should be capable and they should be wise. The king should ascertain that before employing them. They should be hardy, able to bear privations like cold, heat and hunger. The king should set spies on his counsellors, on his friends and even on his sons. His spies should be strangers to each other. The moment a king realises that his foe is stronger, he should strive to make peace. If he is sure of his strength, he should collect a large army and march against the person who has no allies and friends or who is engaged in war against another. The king should know how to take them by surprise. He should not hesitate to afflict the kingdom of the enemy with weapons, fire and poison.

"The king should take a sixth of the income of his subjects. This is for the maintenance of the army for their protection. A king's subjects are his children. But he should guard against compassion while punishing them for their wrong behaviour.

"Honest men who are absolutely trustworthy should be appointed to administer justice. The state has her strong foundation only upon the proper administration of justice.

"There need be no doubt whatever about the truth that it is the king that makes the age and not the age which makes the king. When a king rules relying entirely and strictly on the science of chastisement, Kritayuga or Satyayuga, the foremost of ages, is said to set in. Righteousness is prevalent during Kritayuga. Unrighteousness does not even exist then. The earth yields crops without even waiting to be tilled. Herbs and plants grow luxuriantly and in abundance. Diseases are not found at all and all men live long. The seasons are all delight-

ful. There is peace and nothing but peace on earth. When the king relies on three of the four parts of this Dandaneeti, Tretayuga sets in. A fourth part of Dharma is gone and an equal portion of Adharma sets in. The earth does yield crops but she waits for the tillage. The herbs and plants need to be nurtured. The yield is not spontaneous. When the king follows the Dandaneeti only by half, the age that sets in is Dwapara. Righteousness is diminished by half and the void is filled up by unrighteousness. The earth, even when tilled, yields only half her crop. When the king ignores the edict of Brahma and begins to oppress his people, the age is Kali. Unrighteousness becomes rampant and nothing of righteousness is seen. The world becomes the home of anarchy. Diseases appear and men die prematurely. The clouds do not rain in season and the crops fail. The king is the cause of the yugas."

Yudhishthira: "Of whose wealth is the king said to be the lord?"

Bheeshma: "The Vedas have declared that the wealth of all persons belongs to the king, with the exception of the brahmins. The king's duty is to support all the brahmins."

Yudhishthira: "Nothing, not even the smallest act, can be accomplished by a single man. He has to have assistance. This is all the more true when one thinks of ruling a kingdom. So much of it depends on the minister of the king. Tell me, what are the characteristics of a minister and his duties? Which kind of man deserves the king's entire confidence?"

Bheeshma: "A king has friends and these can be classified into four types. The first is the man whose object coincides with that of the king. The second is the man who is devoted to the king. The third is one related to the king by birth. The fourth is one whom the king has placated by gifts. There is a fifth and that is a righteous man who firmly serves one and not both sides. He belongs to the side where there is righteousness. To this man the king should never confide plans which are in danger of being disapproved. A king who wants to be successful has to be righteous and unrighteous too according to circumstances. And so, he cannot be too careful in regard to these friends. A wicked man may appear to be honest and an honest man is likely to become dishonest. No man can always be of the same mind all the time. No one should be trusted completely. Entire reliance on the ministers is not wise. And again, a want of trust is also wrong. A king's policy, therefore, should be trust as well as mistrust.

"A king should fear his kinsmen as he would death himself. A kinsman can never bear to see the prosperity of the king. At the same time, a king without kinsmen is unfortunate indeed. The policy is: mistrusting them at heart, but behaving with them as though he trusts them completely."

Yudhishthira: "What should be the characteristics of the legislators, the ministers of war, the courtier, and the counsellors of a king?"

Bheeshma: "The legislators should be men who are modest, self-restrained, truthful and sincere, and they should have the courage to speak what is proper. The ministers for war should be those who are always by the side of the king. They should be very brave. They should belong to the higher caste, and be learned and affectionate to a fault as far as the king is concerned. A courtier should be of high lineage. He should always be honoured by the king. He should be a man who has the king's interests always at heart. He should never abandon the king whatever the circumstances may be.

"The officers of the army should again be of high lineage, born in the country of the king; possessed of wisdom, great learning, and beauty of form and features. They should be of excellent behaviour, and they should be devoted to the king.

"Four brahmins learned in the Vedas, possessed of great dignity and belonging to the Snataka order and of pure unblemished behaviour: eight kshatriyas all of whom should be very strong physically and proficient in the use of all the weapons: twenty-one vaisyas all of whom should be wealthy: three sudras all of whom should possess humility and pure conduct: and one man of the suta caste: these should be the ministers of the king. Everyone of them should be fifty or more years old.

"Punishment should be given to offenders according to the immensity of the offence. The wealthy should be fined and their property should be confiscated, while loss of liberty should be the punishment for the poor offender. Wicked conduct should be punished by inflicting corporal punishment.

"The king should levy taxes, but they should never be so high as to hurt the subjects. He should know how to milk his kingdom. He should be like a bee gathering honey from the flowers. He should be a leech which draws blood mildly without the victim being conscious of it. He should behave like a tigress with her cubs while handling his subjects: she catches them with her teeth and yet never hurts them."

Yudhishthira: "How should a king behave?"

Bheeshma: "Righteousness is the watchword of a king. Nothing is greater than that in this world. A righteous king can easily conquer the entire world. His counsellors should all be pure in heart and pure in mind. Malice should have no place in the heart of a king. His senses should be perfectly under control. He should use his intelligence and he will then be glorious: swelling in greatness like the ocean fed with the waters of a thousand rivers."

Yudhishthira: "The path of duty is very long. It has a hundred branches. Tell me, what are the duties that have to be practised?"

Bheeshma: "The worship of mother, father and preceptor: these are the most important duties. Attending to this duty fits a king to acquire great fame and the heavens. These three should be worshipped and their commands should be obeyed implicitly. They are like the three fires that have to be worshipped daily. Serving the father helps one to cross this world. Serving the mother transports him to the heavens. Serving the preceptor one attains the region of Brahma."

Yudhishthira: "I want to know about Dharma, Artha and Kama. The course of life proceeds onwards. Which of these three helps to steady that course in the right direction?"

Bheeshma: "The three exist together, side by side, when a man amasses wealth always taking care to walk in the path of Dharma. Wealth has its root in virtue, and pleasure is said to be the fruit of wealth. All of these again, are firmly planted in Will. Objects exist in this world for the gratification of the senses, and Will is concerned with these objects. The sum total of the three depends on these. Entire abstraction from all objects of pleasure is called Emancipation. Virtue is desirable for the protection of the body, and wealth for acquiring virtue. Pleasure is, after all, only for gratifying the senses. All three, however, have one quality in common: passion. The pursuit of these three for the sake of themselves, with a desire to enjoy their fruits, makes the rewards remote. However, if the pursuit is spurred by a desire for knowledge, the knowledge of self, when they become the means for an end which is noble, the realization of self, then the reward is immense. Virtue is to be acquired for the purification of the soul. Wealth should be acquired so that it may be spent without any desire for the fruits. Pleasure is to be pursued just for supporting the body and not for gratifying it. Hence it is said that all three of them have their roots in Will. Dharma, Artha and Kama are not ends in themselves, but are just means to an end, and that end is Moksha. These three should be abandoned when one has freed oneself by ascetic penance. Emancipation is the only goal of man."

Yudhishthira: "Intelligence, they say, is superior to everything else: intelligence which helps one to plan the future and provide for it: which can meet with any kind of emergency. Tell me about intelligence, particularly when a king has a difficult task to perform: as for instance when he is assailed by many foes. How will intelligence help him to protect himself?"

Bheeshma: "I will tell you about the duties of a king when in distress. A foe then becomes a friend, and a friend will most probably turn out to be a foe. Circumstances will so conspire that the course of

human actions becomes uncertain. This is where intelligence comes to one's rescue. It helps you to decide whether one should make war on the foe or make peace with him. It all depends on the time and place, and, at times, it is even necessary to make friends with the enemy. You should make friends with intelligent men who are desirous of your welfare. If your life cannot otherwise be saved, then you should certainly make peace with the enemy. If you are foolish enough not to consider this, then you will never succeed in achieving things for which everyone strives so hard. A king, who makes a truce with the enemy, and quarrels with his erstwhile friends after considering the situation to the utmost, its pros and its cons, will certainly be able to succeed.

"Friends should be examined to the utmost before accepting them as friends. Foes should be well studied and their strength and weakness known. Friends appear as foes, and foes assume the guise of friends. When friendly compacts are undertaken, it is not possible to be sure if the feelings of the other are really friendly or if it is just selfishness which prompts him to accept the pact. The words 'friend' and 'foe' are, after all, relative terms. A man considers another to be his friend so long as he is assured that his interests are safe: so long as he is sure that it is profitable for him to do so. If he is sure that this state of things will continue as long as the other man is alive, he allows the friendship to continue for life.

"Self-interest is the most powerful factor in the life of everyone. The entire world is pivoted round only this one factor and it ever revolves around it. No one is dear to another unless there is some gain involved. No affection is evident unless there is a motive of self-interest. One man is popular because he is very liberal-minded, another because he speaks sweetly and a third because he is very religious. Generally it is the rule rather than the exception that a man is dear because of the purpose he serves: nothing more. The friendship terminates as soon as the reason for the friendship dies.

"An intelligent man should know when to make peace with a foe. Remember, when two persons who were once enemies become friends it is obvious that each is only biding his time when he can get the better of the other. The wiser of the two will necessarily succeed. The policy is that, while you are afraid of the other man, you should appear as though you are not. You should appear as though you trust him implicitly and, all the time, you should be mistrusting him. When the time demands it you should make peace with your foe and at the earliest opportunity you must wage war. This rule should apply even for a friend."

Yudhishthira: "Tell me, what is the source of sin? Where does it proceed from and what is the foundation on which it is built?"

Bheeshma: "Covetousness is the one root of all sin. It destroys all merit and all goodness. From it proceeds the river of sin. It is from this single source that many of the sins flow. Covetousness is the eternal spring of cunningness and hypocrisy. Wrath is born of covetousness, lust is born of covetousness and several of the terrible maladies of the mind spring from covetousness: loss of judgement, deception, pride, arrogance, malice, vindictiveness, shamelessness, loss of virtue, anxiety and infamy. These are some of the many children of covetousness. Let me recount to you the names of some more of them. Miserliness, cupidity, desire for every kind of improper behaviour, pride of birth, pride of learning, pride of beauty, pride of wealth, pitilessness, malevolence, insincerity, appropriation of another's wealth, harshness of speech, talking ill of others, gluttony, a love of falsehood, and a love of every kind of evil act. In life no man has ever been able to give up covetousness. Life may decay, but this will never wane in its power. Even men of great learning, whose minds are the very treasury of all the scriptures, who have the intelligence to clear all the many doubts of others, are found to be incompetent to manage their own affairs. They are spineless and weak, and it is because they are slaves of this dread disease: covetousness."

Yudhishthira: "Tell me about ignorance."

Bheeshma: "Ignorance, my child, again has its origin in this covetousness. As covetousness grows, ignorance grows with it. The root of covetousness is but loss of clear thinking, loss of judgement, and so ignorance is an inseparable companion of covetousness."

Yudhishthira: "What are the duties which should be preferred to all others?"

Bheeshma: "The highest duty is self-restraint. Just as the great sin covetousness leads to all sins, self-restraint leads a man to the highest glory. It has a number of good qualities born of it: forgiveness, patience, abstaining from injuring others, impartiality, truth, sincerity, modesty, steadiness, liberality, freedom from wrath, contentment, sweetness of speech, benevolence, freedom from malice. A man who is self-restrained will never be a slave to the attachments of the earth. He attains emancipation. He is almost on the threshold of it when he becomes self-restrained."

Yudhishthira: "I desire to hear about truth."

Bheeshma: "Truth is the duty of every human being. It is an eternal duty. Truth is the highest refuge. Truth is the greatest penance. Truth is the highest yoga and Truth is the Eternal Brahman. It is the sacrifice which is greater than all other sacrifices. All the three worlds rest on Truth and nothing else. Truth is of thirteen kinds. Impartiality, self-control, forgiveness, modesty, endurance, goodness,

renunciation, contemplation, dignity, fortitude, compassion and abstinence from injury. All these are aspects of Truth. Truth is immutable, eternal, unchangeable."

Yudhishthira: "What is that good thing which one should strive for?"

Bheeshma: "This world is ever threatened by death. The nights which come and go do but lessen the span of one's life. Death waits for no man. It is nearing every creature every moment. Its progress is imperceptible but it is ever steady. With the passing of each day, man's life is shortened. Death comes before man's desires have been fulfilled. When he is busy plucking the flowers, death snatches a man away like a beast of prey carrying away a ram. What you have planned to do tomorrow must be done today. What you have planned to do in the afternoon must be done in the forenoon. Death is ruthless. It will never wait and see if all your acts have been carried out. Man should hurry and practise virtue in the prime of life. Life is so uncertain and only death is certain. It may come now or it may come years later The readiness is important. Virtue will grant you fame in this world and happiness in the next.

"Man is plagued with a thousand desires in this world. He becomes attached to many things and many people. His work, his lands, his children, his home: all these have woven a web of attachment from which he is torn away by death. Nothing can resist the force of this web of attachment except truth. Knowledge of the true values of things makes a man realise the transitoriness of the things of the world, and to such a man death has no terrors. Truth is immortality. In the same body can be found the germs of death as well as immortality. It is all in your hands whether you nurture the one or the other. Earthly bondages are so easily formed. It is easy for anyone to nurture the plant of attachment which is but another name for death.

"The wise man, however, restrains his senses. He rises above the grasping hands of desire and wrath. He will know how to treat pleasure and pain alike. Tranquillity becomes his for the asking, and he attains immortality. His words, his thoughts, his renunciation and his yoga rest on the eternal, the Brahman, and he escapes death.

"The eye of knowledge is the keenest eye. Truth is the greatest penance. Attachment is the most terrible of all sorrows. Renunciation is the source of the greatest happiness.

"We are born from Brahman through Brahman. Devoting oneself to Brahman one can return to Brahman. Seek the self which is concealed in a cave."

Yudhishthira: "Describe to me the man who is dear to all. Who is said to be perfectly accomplished, to be endowed with all the merits that the world speaks about?"

Bheeshma: "Such a man as you describe will be learned. He will

be good and pious. His blood will never get heated by pride. Discontent and wrath will not be found in him. His senses will never lead him astray, and he will always have peace born of the realization of the Supreme Truth."

Yudhishthira: "What makes a man a sinner and what makes him virtuous? What helps him to achieve renunciation? How does he attain emancipation?"

Bheeshma: "Desire is responsible for making a man a sinner. When it sees an object of the sense, desire seeks it. For the sake of getting what he wants man begins to strive for it. The objects of the senses appear so agreeable that man tries his best to get them. Attachment follows in the wake of desire. Immediately follow aversion, greed and error of judgment. The mind becomes confused, clouded, and man does not any more follow the path of virtue. Assuming a virtue which he does not possess is now the policy of man, and he becomes a hypocrite. Acquiring wealth with the help of hypocrisy is easy for a man who has begun the downward path to sin. In spite of the advice of well-wishers and elders, man begins to act in a sinful manner. There is no more hope of salvation for a confirmed sinner like the man just described.

"The man who is righteous seeks the good of others, and so he wins good for himself. He is wise and knows how to avoid the pitfalls called the senses. He is wise as to the real nature of happiness and sorrow. Man attains mastery over the senses, and that is called virtue. But still he is discontented. He will not rest until he has mastered the art of renunciation. Knowledge helps him to be free of desire. Finally, realizing that the world is but a passing pageant, that it will be destroyed any time, he tries to cast off virtue with its rewards in the form of heaven and happiness, and tries to attain emancipation."

Yudhishthira: "What are the attributes that are necessary for a man if he wants to be free from attachment and attain emancipation?"

Bheeshma: "The man fit for emancipation has passed far beyond the ken of the world of the senses. Hunger and thirst do not bother him nor is he affected by other states of the physical body. His mind is untrammelled by wrath, cupidity and error. Folly never makes him forget himself. To such a man, a hovel built of bamboo and reeds is the same as the palace of a king. Pleasure and pain do not touch him since he is fully conscious of their birth in delusion. To him, the world is just the consequence of the five primal elements combining all together. This truth is always present in his mind when he looks on the world. Pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, are equal in his eyes. Fear is not in him nor is there place for anxiety in his heart. He knows fully well that king after king possessed of great

power and greater glory abode in this world for a while and then have departed. All things of this earth are transitory: that is the first truth he has realized. Experience of the world and true knowledge have waked in him the truth about the world, and he views everything as unsubstantial. Equipped as he is with so much wisdom, a man attains emancipation wherever he is: whether in domestic life or in the forest."

Yudhishthira: "Your statement intrigues me. Without abandoning domesticity, without adopting life in the forest, how can man attain emancipation?"

Bheeshma: "A king need not give up his kingdom at all for attaining emancipation. You should be free of all attachment. If you are unmoved by companionship of any kind, if you can fix your thoughts on the Eternal Brahman, you can be emancipated. Renunciation is the keynote for this path. It is the highest means. Renunciation follows where knowledge guides the mind. Knowledge leads the mind towards yoga and through yoga man attains to the Brahmic state. A man leading domestic life can certainly attain emancipation if he can claim to have acquired Yama and Niyama equal to a Sanyasin."

Yudhishthira: "Where does the Goddess of prosperity reside?"

Bheeshma: "An eloquent person, an active person, an attentive person, is ever the home of prosperity. Free of wrath, he should have his passions under control, and he should be high-minded. A man of little energy is spurned by her. So also one who is diffident and who is wrathful. Brahmins who are devoted to the study of the Vedas, Kshatriyas who are devoted to righteousness, Vaisyas who are devoted to cultivation and Sudras who have devotion in their hearts: all these are the dwelling places of the Goddess of prosperity."

Yudhishthira: "What are the duties of a man who has hopes of passing through this world pleasantly and who has hopes of reaching the next world?"

Bheeshma: "The three acts of the body, destruction of the lives of other creatures, theft of what belongs to others and the enjoyment of the wife of another man, should be avoided by a man who aspires for all that you say. He should avoid the four acts that are possible with speech: evil conversation, harsh words, publishing other people's fallacies and falsehood. One should avoid the three acts of the mind: coveting the possessions of others, injuring others and disbelief in the ordinances of the Vedas. If these ten acts are avoided, man will be assured of a pleasant passage through this world and a place in the next world."

Yudhishthira: "Is there anything which is superior to the practice of Brahmacharya? I want also to know the highest indication of virtue and the highest kind of purity."

Bheeshma: "Abstaining from wine and meat is even superior to Brahmacharya. The best indication of virtue is righteousness, and it is also the highest kind of purity."

Yudhishthira: "When should one practise Dharma? When should one acquire Artha? When should Kama be indulged in?"

Bheeshma: "The first part of one's life is the time when wealth should be earned. Righteousness should then be practised and the enjoyment of pleasure comes later. All this with the special observance that one should not attach oneself to any of these. The end and aim of man should be Moksha."

Yudhishthira: "Which is the Teertha of the greatest purity?"

Bheeshma: "There is no doubt that all teerthas are capable of purifying man. But the best of all teerthas which is capable of purifying man is—TRUTH. One should bathe in the teertha called the mind which cannot be fathomed, which has no stain and which is pure. This teertha has TRUTH for its waters and the lake of the mind is made up of understanding. Once a man bathes in this Manasa Sarovara, he becomes heir to sincerity, gentleness, truthfulness, compassion, self-restraint and tranquillity."

Yudhishthira: "Who is the true friend of man? Is it his father or mother or son or preceptor or kinsmen or friend? When one dies, his body has to be abandoned like a piece of wood or like a clod of earth. Who is the friend who follows him to the next world?"

Bheeshma: "Man is born alone and he dies alone. Alone he comes into this beautiful world and alone he must go when he leaves this world. He has not a single companion in his march through this incident called life. All those you spoke about, the father, the mother, sons, kinsmen, friends, or the preceptor, turn away from you once you are dead. Leaving the dead form of you like a piece of wood or a clod of earth after mourning for a few moments, they turn away from you and go on with their work. They have no more interest in your body which is all that is left of you. Only Dharma, righteousness, follows the body that has been abandoned by all. That is the only friend of man and that is the one thing that should be sought by man."

Yudhishthira: "Who is the One God in the world? The One Object which is our Sole Refuge? By worshipping whom does one obtain all that one desires? Which is the One Religion which is the foremost of all religions? What is the mantra, reciting which, man becomes freed from the bondage of birth?"

Bheeshma: "Krishna is the Lord of the Universe. He is the God of Gods. He is the foremost of all beings. By Him is pervaded this universe. Meditating on Him and on His many names man can transcend all sorrow. The foremost of all religions is Krishna. He is the

highest Energy. He is the highest penance. He is the highest refuge. He is the holiest of holies. He is the beginning of all creation and the end of all creation. Krishna is the Eternal Brahman. Surrender yourself to Him and you will be one with Him: with Krishna the Lord of the Past, the Present and the Future: the Supreme Soul."

The days of instruction were over. Bheeshma said: "My child, I have taught you all that you wanted to learn. Go back to your kingdom and begin your rule. The people will be as happy as they were when the great kings Nahusha, Harischandra and Yayati ruled this world. You carry my blessings with you. Go, my child, and come to me when Uttarayana comes on. I have been waiting for that. I will see you once again then".

Yudhishthira took tender leave of him and they all went back to Hastinapura.

CHAPTER 12

THE PASSING OF BHEESHMA

When the holy day came, the day which was to grant Bheeshma freedom from this human bondage, all the Pandavas led by Dhritarashtra and Krishna went to the field carrying auspicious things with them: flowers and incense and gems and fruits and costly silks. Dhritarashtra, Gandhari, Kunti, the five brothers with Draupadi, Krishna with Satyaki, Vidura and Yuyutsu went to the field where Bheeshma was waiting for his release.

They walked to his presence. Bheeshma was surrounded by all the rishis. Vyaasa, Parasara, Narada and all the rishis from the heavens were by the side of Bheeshma. Yudhishthira saluted his grandfather and said: "My lord! I am Yudhishthira, the Pandava. I am here with my brothers and all those who are near and dear to you. The entire city of Hastinapura has come to pay its respect to your honoured self. Your son Dhritarashtra is here. My lord! Krishna is here. Be pleased to open your eyes and look on all of us".

Bheeshma opened his tired eyes and looked at the ocean of people who had assembled to pay their respect to him. He said: "I am happy to see you with all these people, my child. At last, at long last, the sun has turned his chariot towards the north. It seems to me as though a hundred years have passed by since I lay me down on this bed of

arrows. The month of Magha has come. It is time for me to leave this earth".

Bheeshma turned to Dhritarashtra and said: "My son, you know all the duties of a king. There is nothing that you do not know. Wise as you are, you should not grieve for the death of your sons. It was Fate. Yudhishthira and his brothers are your sons. They are devoted to you. Be happy with them".

Bheeshma turned his eyes on Krishna. He called for flowers and worshipped Krishna with them. He said: "You are the Lord of the Universe. You are the Purusha and you are the Creator of the world. You are the Supreme Eternal Soul. Reveal to me your Viswaroopa and grant me permission to depart from this world. Grant me leave to cast off this human body. Permitted by you I will reach the highest end". Bheeshma saw the infinite splendour of the Lord's Viswaroopa. Krishna said: "Devavrata, I do grant you leave to reach your home. You can go back to the Vasus. You will never be born again in this world of mortal men. You are like Markandeya. Death is waiting at your doorsteps, waiting like a servant, for your summons. You can summon death".

Bheeshma's face was lit up by an unearthly smile. He closed his eyes and lay still for a few moments. He made a gentle effort and willed himself to die. Those around him saw a wonderful glow leave his body. It rose up in the sky and became lost in the clouds. There was heard heavenly instruments making sweet music. The sky was filled with it. A cool breeze blew, laden with the perfume of a thousand heavenly flowers. The earth was cool and pleasant. The heart of everyone was filled with a strange peace when the soul of Bheeshma went on its journey to the heavens.

They placed his body with all the arrows on a pyre made of sandalwood. Yudhishthira and Vidura wrapped the body of the great man in silk and flowers. Yuyutsu held the royal white umbrella over it. The funeral procession was solemn and splendid. The Sama was chanted by the brahmins and Dhritarashtra set fire to the pyre. Yudhishthira and his brothers with Vidura and Dhritarashtra stood on the right side of the pyre.

The next day they collected the bones of Bheeshma and went to the river Ganga. They offered the oblations to Ganga who bore Bheeshma. The river stopped flowing. Ganga rose up from the river and came ashore, weeping and lamenting her child. She looked at all the many who had assembled there and said: "My child is dead. He was a devoted son and he was loved by all. He was invincible. Even the great Bhagavan Bhargava had to admit defeat at the hands of my child. And such a hero has been killed by Sikhandi. Surely. my heart is

made of stone, or else it should have been broken long ago. The man who was without an equal in this entire world has been killed. I have lost my child. I had hopes of his ruling this world and I see him dead. My child, my poor unfortunate child, is dead, and I am left lamenting". Her grief was terrible. Krishna went near her and said: "Weep not, mother of the world. Your son has gone to the world to which he belongs. You know that he was one of the Vasus and had to spend these years on the world because of a curse. He is not made like the other men. He is not meant to govern the kingdom like ordinary kings. Do not grieve for him. Do not let your human affections cloud your wisdom. Your son was a god and he is again one with the gods. There is nothing here for you to grieve. Rejoice that he has at last been released from the curse to live on the world of mortal men!"

Ganga disappeared from their sight and the river resumed its flow. It flowed placidly on as it had been flowing since the beginning of time.

With sorrow and gladness blended in a strange manner, they all returned to the city Hastinapura.

Chapter 13

KRISHNA RETURNS TO DWARAKA

Try as he might, Yudhishthira was not able to forget the past. It was burning him day and night. When Dhritarashtra sent word to him through Sanjaya, before the war, he had said that Yudhishthira, with his gentle nature, would repent for destroying his cousins, for the rest of his life. He spoke the truth. The state of the king was causing them worry. Dhritarashtra, forgetting his own pain, tried to pacify Yudhishthira. Krishna too joined in the entreaties of the old king. Finally it was possible to bring him back to a normal frame of mind. Yudhishthira took up the task of ruling the kingdom with great sincerity and he was acclaimed the ideal ruler. Everyone was happy under his rule. He won the heart of everyone with his sweet and compassionate nature.

Arjuna and Krishna spent their time in going back to the places where they used to walk together in the old days. They went to their beloved Indraprastha and spent several days there. It was pleasant to roam about the gardens and halls of the great sabha. They talked

of all the many things which had happened since they last walked there. It looked as though not many days had passed since they were there last. Actually it was fifteen years back that these two friends were there together. Fifteen years back the forest by name Khandava was burnt by Agni. Maya was saved from the fire and he had offered to do them a favour. Krishna had suggested the building of the Mayasabha. Then came Narada and his talk about the Rajasuya.

Looking back in retrospect, they tried to pick out the important incidents: the several scenes which made up this tragic drama. Draupadi's appearance on the stage was actually the first act. The meeting between Krishna and the Pandavas was the second act. Narada's coming was the third act. The mind of Yudhishthira was upset by the fact that his father was not in the sabha of Indra because he had not performed the Rajasuya. That was the beginning of all this pain. The killing of Sisupala was the next act. It was the fourth act in the tragic drama. The other acts followed in quick succession. The game of dice with Sakuni in the leading role was the fifth act and the court scene was the sequel to it. It was the beginning of the end. The court scene where Draupadi was dragged to the court was the climax. The drama had reached the pinnacle of intensity when they all took their oaths. The rest was the catastrophe. The later acts were laden with retribution. The scene in Dwaraka when Duryodhana and Arjuna went to ask for the help of Krishna was the sixth act. It decided the fates of all of them, the moment when Arjuna chose Krishna as his charioteer. The war itself was the final act: the seventh. The eighteen days of war, the death of the great Bheeshma, Drona, Radheya and Abhimanyu were just scenes in that mighty seventh act. With the death of Sakuni the drama was over. The tragic drama was ended. The death of Duryodhana was the final denouement. The drama covered a period of several years. They had reached the stage when they could look back on it. They had travelled some distance of time and they could look back and review the years without emotion. Memory did wince when she took up some moments in her hands. But they were now secure from the gnawing pain that was in their hearts a few months back.

Krishna said: "Arjuna, the war is over. Your enemies have all been killed. Yudhishthira is the monarch of the Kuru kingdom. I had taken upon my shoulders this burden. My task is over. My thoughts are turned towards Dwaraka now. I desire to see my parents. I dare not ask your brother for permission to go. You must first permit me to go, Arjuna. Then you can tell Yudhishthira about my wish to go home. If he is willing to let me go I will leave for Dwaraka. If, however, he wishes me to stay on, I will. Yudhishthira's wishes mean

more to me than my own. You are all able to help your brother to rule the kingdom. He has Vidura to counsel him. My purpose is served. I think it is time I go back home. Arjuna, please grant me permission to go".

Arjuna shed tears of sorrow at the words of Krishna. So their great partnership was at an end. The inseparables, Partha and his Sarathi, were to be parted. His heart was aching for the days of the long ago to come back. Even if it meant re-living the war, he did not mind it. He wanted to recapture the thrill of those days when they would set out to the battle-field blowing their conchs lustily. The eighteen days of war were the most thrilling days in his lifetime. He and Krishna would not be parted even for a moment. They were always together. And now he heard Krishna saying: "My purpose is served". Arjuna remembered the day when his chariot was burnt. Krishna had said that everything in the world was created for a purpose. Once that purpose was served the world had no more need of it. But it was not so with Krishna! He was needed. Arjuna would be lost without him. He could not say that his work was done: that his purpose was over: the purpose for which he had been born.

Arjuna wept tears of anguish and said: "My lord! Your purpose served! Please do not say that once more! I cannot bear it". Krishna laughed at him and said: "I did not mean to hurt you, Arjuna. I just meant the war when I said that. I know that you need me. More than that, I need you. I cannot live without you. Have you still not realized that you and I are part of each other? Half my soul is Arjuna". Krishna told him about the night before the death of Jayadratha. He told him about his conversation with Daruka and his deciding to fight if it came to the worst. Arjuna was touched by the words of Krishna. They sat in silence for a while. They were so fond of each other. It was not necessary to talk about it. They wandered each into the mind of the other. After a long time Arjuna agreed to allow Krishna to go back to Dwaraka on condition that he would come back very soon. Krishna smiled and said: "Of course! I cannot stay away from you for long. I will come back soon". They returned to Hastinapura. These few days at Indraprastha were very happy days. Arjuna was happy they had gone to their old haunts.

They went to the presence of Dhritarashtra and Yudhishthira. The night was spent happily. In the morning Arjuna and Krishna went to the chambers of Yudhishthira. They spent some time together. Arjuna gently spoke about Krishna's desire to return to his Dwaraka. The very mention of it brought tears to the eyes of Yudhishthira. He composed himself and said: "Krishna, it is but right that you should wish to see your parents. I do not want to prevent you from going.

But, Krishna, how can we live without you? You are part of me and I cannot think of letting you go. But I must allow it. I will send you on one condition. As in the days of old when we were at Indraprastha, you must come to me whenever I think of you. When I wanted you, you have always known it and come to me. It must be so even now. Go, my child, go and see your father and your dear mother. They have not seen you for a long time. So much has happened since they saw you last". He embraced Krishna and gave him permission to go back to Dwaraka.

Krishna's chariot driven by Daruka was at the doorway of the palace. The leave-taking was very tender. Satyaki was sobbing with emotion when he took leave of the Pandavas. They had gone through so much together. Bheema was standing there stupefied. He would be so lonely after the departure of Krishna and Satyaki, his friend. Krishna took leave of all of them. He prostrated before Dhritarashtra, Gandhari, Kunti, Vidura, Yudhishthira and Bheema. They blessed him. Draupadi bade him farewell. The chariot was waiting. With great unwillingness Krishna ascended the chariot followed by Satyaki. They all stood there watching the chariot until it disappeared from their sight. Wiping their eyes, they went into the palace.

CHAPTER 14

PARIKSHIT: THE ASWAMEDHA YAGA

Vyaasa was a frequent visitor to the court of Yudhishthira. He came again and was honoured. He knew that the king had still not got over his grief. He said: "It will be a very great achievement if you perform the yaga called the Aswamedha. It will make you happy and it is the proper thing for a monarch to do". He told the Pandavas that it was not an easy thing since it needed immense wealth and they could get it from the Himalayan mountains. The Maruts had buried their treasure under the slopes of the great mountain. Yudhishthira was very pleased with the suggestion of the wise Vyaasa. He found that his brothers too welcomed the suggestion with enthusiasm. Bheema was particularly happy since he found his brother enthusiastic about something. He was tired of seeing the incessant mourning of Yudhishthira. As for Arjuna, he was thrilled at the thought of fighting once again. He offered to go round the world leading the sacrificial horse. He would conquer all the kings who would dare to oppose him. The

Pandavas sent word to Krishna that they were all going towards the Himalayas with the purpose of collecting the untold wealth of the Maruts: that the king was going to perform the Aswamedha according to the suggestion of Vyaasa. They requested Krishna and Balarama and all the Vrishnis to go to Hastinapura as early as they could. The kingdom was left in the hands of Yuyutsu, and Yudhishthira set out with great happiness. He loved the Himalayas and his heart was light. Vyaasa was wise in his suggestion. This new plan was keeping the king occupied. He had something to do and he had no time to brood.

They went to their beloved Himalayas and spent some time there. They collected the wealth of the Maruts and began their return journey.

The entire host of the Vrishnis had reached Hastinapura to attend the Aswamedha of Yudhishthira. They came even before the Pandavas had returned from the north. The main reason for this early arrival was this. Uttara's child was to be born any moment now. Krishna knew that it would not be alive when it came. He had taken an oath that he would give it life in spite of its being burnt by the great Brahmasirshastra. Krishna had come early to give life to that child, the heir to the throne of the Pauravas.

They spent a few happy days there. The great day came. Uttara gave birth to a child which had no life. Knowing this by instinct, Krishna, accompanied by Satyaki, hurried to the chambers where Uttara was lying in bed. He met Kunti coming out of the room weeping and wailing. She saw Krishna and said: "Krishna, you have got to give life to the hope of the Pandavas. Your nephew's child has got to live. You are my only hope. Come with me and see that child which wants to live but cannot since Aswatthama has not allowed it to live". Krishna raised up the weeping queen and said: "Do not fear. I have promised that I will make the child of Abhimanyu live. I will do it even if I have to spend all the punya I have acquired all these days". Krishna entered the chambers of Uttara. They were all there: Draupadi and Subhadra and all the women of the royal household. Uttara saw him and rushed to him and fell at his feet. She fainted away. They lifted her up and placed her on a couch nearby.

Krishna saw the tiny little body of the new-born child. It was lifeless. His heart was swelling with affection for this bit of flesh which was all that was left of his beloved Abhimanyu. It had to be revived. Yes, it had to be. Krishna's face was now stern. His smile had vanished. No one could recognize this Krishna. They were looking at him with their eyes open wide with amazement. He looked as though he did not belong to this world. He was far away. Suddenly Krishna took the little child in his hands. It was limp as a lotus hurt by snow. Krishna took it in his lotus hands. He passed his divine

hands along the body of the child. His fingers travelled from the head to the little toes of the child. At the touch of his blessed hands the child became alive. It began to cry lustily. It had been granted life.

Krishna was limp with exhaustion. Sweat was pouring down his face in tiny rivulets. He came out of the chambers. He could not walk. He looked so tired. He sat on a stone seat for a while. Satyaki was waiting for him. He had heard the cry of the child. He was happy. He saw Krishna come out of the chambers of Uttara as though he were in a daze. He saw Krishna stagger towards the stone seat. Satyaki saw Krishna to be in a trance. Satyaki waited for him to come. He guessed that Krishna would not be pleased if he intruded into his inmost thoughts. It was evident that this task had drained him of all his energy: his spiritual energy. Krishna was regaining it. It was a sacred moment. Krishna was tuning himself to be in touch with the Infinite in order to get his energy back. Satyaki waited.

Krishna came to him. He looked the same old Krishna. His face glowed with a new light. He looked as though he had gone through a strange experience. Satyaki did not speak about it. He said: "So Abhimanyu lives again. Glory will be yours for this act of yours, Krishna. It is a greater achievement than winning the war on the Kurukshetra field". Krishna smiled and said: "Yes, Satyaki, this was more difficult than winning the war". They walked away from there with their hands locked together.

The palace was a temple of joy. The entire kingdom was celebrating the birth of the heir to the throne of the Pauravas. A month passed. The child of Abhimanyu was given the name Parikshit. The days were spent in celebrating the event. Even Subhadra was able to forget her pain when she saw the son of her Abhimanyu.

They heard that Yudhishthira was returning from the north. Krishna and the others went to meet them half way. The entire party entered the city with great enthusiasm. Vyaasa came, and the preparations were begun for the Aswamedha. The king saw the new-born child of Abhimanyu, and his sorrow was all gone at the sight of the child. It was amusing to see Bheema carrying the small child in his huge big hands. He was very fond of their grandson.

Yudhishthira came to Krishna and said: "Krishna, please listen to my words. I have a request to make. You must perform this yaga. You have won this kingdom for us and it is but right that you should perform the Aswamedha". Krishna smiled gratefully at Yudhishthira and said: "You are the ruler of the kingdom. You are the lord and master for all of us. It is but right that the Aswamedha yaga should be performed by a king of the lunar race. It is all in the tradition of the kings of this house. Your dear grandfather has said that

you will be like Nahusha and Harischandra. I will be greatly honoured if I am allowed to serve you as one of your vassals. I am proud of you, my lord. I am a very happy man. I am seeing all my dreams come true, one after another. They all come true, my lord, if only one has the patience for it". Krishna was feeling happy to see that the king had thrown off his sorrow and was glowing like the sun after it has come out of the eclipse. He could see that Yudhishthira was really happy.

Arjuna was sent to the four quarters with the sacrificial horse. He went in all the four quarters and the conquests were all easy. He was not opposed in many of the countries. In the places where he was opposed it was not hard for him to defeat the kings and collect dues from them. He invited all the kings to attend the Aswamedha yaga and returned to Hastinapura with the white sacrificial horse.

Bheema and Nakula with Sahadeva were in charge of all the arrangements. Then began the preparations for the yaga. It was just like the great Rajasuya which Yudhishthira had performed years back. The Pandavas and Krishna with the heroes of the Vrishni House were there. But all the other kings were the children or the nephews of the kings who had attended the Rajasuya. The Aswamedha yaga was over. All the kings returned to their kingdoms after they had been honoured by Yudhishthira. Krishna and Balarama with Satyaki and the other Vrishni heroes returned to Dwaraka.

CHAPTER 15

THE DEATH OF THE ELDERS

Fifteen years had passed. The rule of Yudhishthira was that of an ideal king and an ideal man. His court had Kripa now. Vyaasa made Yudhishthira appoint him as the tutor to Parikshit. Hastinapura was ruled by the ablest of men and the people were happy. Dhritarashtra, however, could not be happy. He knew that Yudhishthira was treating him as a king and as a father: that he was the most affectionate person he had ever met. But the heart of the old man was thinking only of his son Duryodhana. He could not forget his favourite child. He was with Yudhishthira for fifteen years and now suddenly he wanted to go away to the forest. He talked it over with Gandhari. They were both of the same thinking. Dhritarashtra wanted to go away from the city where his son ruled once. He summoned Yudhish-

thira to his presence and told him about his wish. The king Yudhishthira was very unhappy and hurt by the attitude of his uncle. He tried to dissuade him. But the old man was adamant. Yudhishthira persisted in his pleading. But it was of no avail. Vyaasa came and told Yudhishthira that he should allow the old king to go to the forest. It was the custom for kings to go away to the forest renouncing worldly desires and it was the proper thing to do. Very unwillingly Yudhishthira allowed Dhritarashtra and Gandhari to go to the forest.

A new shock was awaiting him. Kunti told him that she was also set on going with the other two. Yudhishthira did not know what to do or what to say. He was terribly upset by the declaration of his mother. All the sons and Draupadi and Subhadra and little Uttara tried to make her change her mind. But she was firm. She said that she had to do expiation for the sin she committed towards her child Radheya. She was very firm about it. They had to allow her to go. Vidura and Sanjaya also accompanied them. The next morning Dhritarashtra, accompanied by Gandhari, Kunti, Vidura and Sanjaya set out for the forest, mourned by all the citizens of Hastinapura. The Pandavas were not happy at the thought of their going. Very sadly they bade farewell to all of them and returned to their empty palace. Their parting from their mother was too much for them. Dhritarashtra was first headed towards the banks of the Ganga and from there he went to the ashrama of Vyaasa. There they stayed, trying to assuage the grief in their hearts by listening to the words of the rishis there.

Yudhishthira could not bear the parting from his mother. Sahadeva was feeling it too. One day, they suddenly decided to go to the forest and visit their mother and Dhritarashtra with Gandhari. It was a very pleasant journey. Soon they reached the ashrama where they were all staying. They were returning from the banks of the river when the Pandavas went there. Sahadeva rushed up to Kunti and fell at her feet. She was very happy to see her favourite child. All of them were seated inside the ashrama. They were not able to speak for a while. Later they spoke of all that had happened during the absence of the elders from the city. Suddenly Yudhishthira looked around and said: "Where is uncle? Where is Vidura?" They told him that Vidura was mortifying himself and was living on just air. They said that he was in the heart of the forest and would come only very rarely. Someone saw him from a distance just then. They showed him to Yudhishthira.

Yudhishthira went towards the spot where Vidura was. He was not the old Vidura. His body was a bundle of bones and he was almost dying. But his eyes were glowing with a strange intensity. Yudhishthira went to him and spoke to him: "I am Yudhishthira, my lord.

Speak to me". It was obvious that Vidura could not speak. He stood leaning against a tree. Yudhishthira found himself compelled to look straight into the eyes of Vidura. Vidura's eyes burned into those of Yudhishthira. The four eyes were locked in this gaze for a while. Yudhishthira was not able to withdraw his eyes. A strange thing happened. Yudhishthira felt himself to be growing stronger and wiser. He found himself to be different. He felt that he was more like Vidura than Yudhishthira. He looked at Vidura and found that he was dead. He realized that Vidura had entered his body and had abandoned his. He wanted the body of Vidura to be cremated. He heard the voice of Dharma from the heavens. Dharma said: "Vidura was the incarnation of Dharma even as you are. When he died he entered your body. You have Vidura in you now. As for his body, do not do anything to it. You must not cremate it since it is part of you. Leave it as it is and go and join your brothers". Yudhishthira went back to the presence of Dhritarashtra and he told them all about his strange experience.

They spent a few days with the old people and then they were asked to return to Hastinapura. The parting from their mother was very difficult for them. Kunti embraced all of them and told her eldest son: "My son, we may not meet again. Take care of my child Sahadeva. I have always loved him most. Though he is old enough, I feel that he is a child. Take care of yourself and all the others. Rule the kingdom well. I bless you all". They parted in tears, and the procession wended its way to Hastinapura once more.

Two years later, Narada came to Hastinapura. He was received with great honour. It was known to Yudhishthira that the visit of Narada meant that he had something important to tell them. All the brothers were there and Narada said: "Yudhishthira, you are right in your guess. I have news of grave import to you. Your uncle Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and Kunti were returning to their hermitage from the river. Sanjaya was with them. They were weak and ill with the severe penance they had been performing. It so happened that a fire had begun to burn the forest where they were staying. They saw the fire and made no attempt to escape from it. The king made Sanjaya leave them before the fire made it impossible for him to escape. He tried to protest, but the king insisted and so Sanjaya went away from there to the Himalaya to spend the rest of his lifetime there. These three allowed themselves to be burnt by the forest fire. I am sorry to be the messenger of this bad news".

Yudhishthira fainted away. Sahadeva wept like a child. Bheema was inconsolable. Their mother was dead. They could not grasp it

at all. But they had to. It was not easy for the sons of Kunti to think of themselves as orphans. Their dear mother was dead. Kunti, who was the one person who went through numberless sufferings for their sake, was now dead. Narada tried to comfort them. Vyaasa came and he too tried to make them face the sorrow with fortitude. It was not possible.

It took them months and years to forget the sorrow caused by the death of their dear mother. But time is a great healer. The Pandavas were once more able to concentrate on other things. They were able to devote themselves to the ruling of the kingdom. Parikshit was their source of comfort. The beautiful son of Abhimanyu was able to dispel their pain and sorrow.

CHAPTER 16

THE TRAGEDY AT PRABHAASA

Several years passed. It was the thirty-sixth year of the rule of Yudhishthira. Thirty-six years had gone by after the great war. Yudhishthira saw in the heavens the same evil omens that were seen to occur just before the great war. These portents spoke of some great calamity that was waiting to befall them. Yudhishthira did not know what was to happen. He felt that some great destruction was imminent. He could not guess what it was to be. He could only guess that something terrible was to happen very soon. Krishna saw these omens too. He sensed the destruction of the Vrishni House. The curse of Gandhari had to be fulfilled. This curse was preceded by another curse.

Once, when the rishis Viswamitra, Kanva and Narada had come to Dwaraka, the young men of the family of Vasudeva tried to play a practical joke on the holy men who had come. They dressed Samba as, a woman and took him to the rishis. The youngsters asked the rishis: "This woman is expecting a child. You are said to have foresight. Can you look into the future and tell us whether she will get a son or a daughter?" The rishis, strangely lacking in that virtue called sense of humour, were very angry because of the joke. They said: "This woman, as you call him, will give birth to an iron rod. That rod will be the cause of the destruction of the entire House of the Vrishnis". The young men were horrified at what they had done. They tried their best to pacify the rishis but they could not. It was a dreadful future that had been predicted. Samba did give birth to an iron rod. The

boys went to Krishna and Balarama and told them the whole story. Balarama was very upset. He ordered the rod to be crushed to powder. The powder was thrown into the sea. They thought that they had managed to outwit fate. Everyone had forgotten the incident—every one except Krishna.

Thirty-six years after the great war, Krishna saw the dreadful portents written in the skies. He knew that it meant the destruction of the entire family. Krishna was unmoved. He was tired of life. He wanted to leave the world. This was the last thing he had to see before he left the world where he had been born to cleanse it of its sins. The fourth quarter of Time, Kali, had already set foot. Krishna could see that men were beginning to lose their sense of Dharma. He would have to be born again when Kali was about to end. But before that he had a chance to go back to where he came from. He had to stay so that the curse of Gandhari could be fulfilled. He looked on his own people. They had lost their righteousness. They were heading for the final quarrel which was to destroy them all.

One day, as was their usual custom, the entire family set out to the place called Prabhaasateertha for the worship of Sankara. It was a very happy group of people. Krishna remembered the time they went to Prabhaasa several years back. It was when Arjuna was in the garden of Subhadra. Krishna had arranged for their elopement and he had brought away his brother and the others to Prabhaasa so that it might be easy for the young lovers to run away unheeded. What a distance of time had been covered since then! This was to be their final trip to Prabhaasa. They would never go there any more. Krishna was now impatient for the end to come. He had become disgusted and disillusioned. He wanted to get away from it all. The caravan of chariots and other vehicles proceeded towards the pleasure spot Prabhaasa. They reached Prabhaasa. Tents were pitched and all were installed in their individual tents for the night. The next day was spent in games of all kinds. There was great feasting and it went on for a number of days.

One day, after this feasting and drinking, they were all talking about old events. Kritavarma was there. Satyaki was drunk, and so were the others. Suddenly Satyaki took it into his head to insult Kritavarma. Ever since he joined the side of Duryodhana in the great war, Satyaki bore him a grudge. He had never forgiven him for that. He decided to taunt him. It was the drink which made him do it. It was also, of course, Fate. Satyaki brought the conversation round to the war and said: "I am yet to see a kshatriya who can kill people who are sleeping, who can set fire to the camp of the enemy like a common thief, and run away to his country, afraid to face the conse-

quences of his act". These words made Kritavarma wild with fury. He was also drunk. He brought up the subject of the killing of Bhoorisravas, and people began to take sides and fight.

It was a drunken brawl. The great House of the Vrishnis had descended to this. Krishna was watching all the while. He saw his son Pradyumna take the side of Satyaki. Satyaki sprang at Kritavarma and said: "Today I will avenge the death of the best man that fought in the great war, Dhrishtadyumna". Satyaki cut off the head of Kritavarma. The brawl became a fight. Those who had no weapons took up the weeds that were growing along the sea-shore and fought with each other. The weeds had all sprung up from the powdered rod of iron which was destined to be the destruction of the House of the Vrishnis. Krishna saw Satyaki killed and he saw his son Pradyumna killed. He knew that he had nothing more to live for. There was nothing more left. Krishna took up handfuls of the weed himself and threw it all at those who were fighting. Each weed became a terrible weapon. The weeds were scattered everywhere. The whole crowd was destroyed in a matter of a few moments. It was destroyed by Krishna. His face had assumed a dreadful aspect. He was Death.

All were dead except Balarama, Krishna and Daruka. Balarama was not to be found there. Daruka and Krishna went in search of him. They found him near the shore of the sea, leaning against a tree. Disgusted with the drunken brawl, Balarama had already left the place and reached the sea-shore. He had decided to give up his life. He was sitting in the yoga trance. Krishna saw him and said: "Daruka, go at once to Hastinapura. Tell my dear Arjuna about the happenings at Prabhaasa. Tell Yudhishthira everything. Tell him about the moral degradation of the Vrishni House. Tell them that the heroes had become so deteriorated that a drunken brawl was enough to destroy them. Tell him about the curse of the rishis and of Gandhari. Bring Arjuna as early as you can to Dwaraka and ask him to take care of the women and children. Ask him to come soon". It was with a heavy heart that Daruka bade farewell to Krishna and set out towards Hastinapura. Krishna hurried to his brother and said: "Brother, wait for me. I will go back to Dwaraka and leave the women and children with our father. I will come back and we can go together".

Krishna went back to Dwaraka. He went to his father Vasudeva and said: "I have sent for Arjuna. He will come and take charge of everything. He will come soon. I have to go back. Balarama is waiting for me. I have to go to him. I cannot look on this Dwaraka without my people. Balarama and I are bent on Tapas". Krishna fell at the feet of his father. He would not look back. He walked away as fast as he could. He reached the spot where his dear brother

was waiting for him. Balarama saw him and went into a trance. Krishna stood by and waited and watched. He saw an immense white serpent coming out of the mouth of Balarama. It came out and disappeared into the ocean. It is said that Krishna is the incarnation of Vishnu and that Balarama is the incarnation of Sesha, the serpent which is the bed of Vishnu. Krishna saw Sesha issuing out of the mouth of Balarama. He knew that his time had come too.

Chapter 17

THE DEATH OF KRISHNA

It was evening. Krishna wandered about, lost in thought. He had reached the end of his life. He had achieved all that he came to achieve. His mind went back to the days at Gokula. He thought of Yasoda, his foster-mother. His thoughts hovered about Radha as a bee would round a flower laden with honey. Krishna brushed the memory away. His mind now went to Mathura, where he had killed the tyrant Kamsa. The years rolled on like the waves of the sea which he was seeing with unseeing eyes. His thoughts rested on the Pandavas. He thought of his first meeting with the Pandavas. Then came the many incidents in their pain-filled lives. Then the war. The destruction of the kshatriyas of the world. Then came the death of Duryodhana and the curse of Gandhari. Krishna had to live to see it fulfilled. He thought of the dead child of Abhimanyu and his giving life to it. He smiled. Yes, it was a great effort to do it. But he had done it. To the last, he had guarded the Pandavas. He had only one regret. He could not meet Arjuna. Suddenly his face was lit up by a sweet smile. He could melt into his dream and speak to him. Krishna sat down in a trance. With great effort of the will he touched the mind of Arjuna with his own. He felt that Arjuna's mind had been drawn by the power of his mind. He was glad about it.

Arjuna was sitting alone in his apartments. He was suddenly reminded of Krishna. He felt that Krishna spoke to him and said: "Arjuna, lie down, Arjuna. I want to talk to you". Arjuna did as he was bid. At once he fell into a deep sleep. Krishna melted into his dream as he had done years ago on the night of Abhimanyu's death. Krishna took his hands in his and said: "Arjuna, do you remember my telling you once that everything in this world is born to serve a purpose? The next moment after having done so, it will have to die".

Arjuna said: "Yes, Krishna. You said it when my chariot was burnt after the war. You also said...." Krishna intervened and said: "Yes, I said that it is even so with men. Each man is set on this strange eventful journey called life. He has been sent into this world with a purpose. Once that purpose is served, the earth has no more need of him. It is the case with all of us, even me. I have created myself on this earth for a purpose. It is not yet over. Something still remains. The moment it is over, I will die too, and so will you and your brothers. Arjuna, do you remember all that?" Arjuna said: "Yes, my lord, I do remember it". Krishna said: "Arjuna, I wanted to tell you that the purpose of my life has been fulfilled. I am going. You must come too. We can never be away from each other". Arjuna said: "Krishna, my lord, what is this you are saying? I cannot grasp what you are saying". Krishna laughed gently and said: "My dearest friend, I wanted to see you just once before going away. I have seen you. I have no regrets. As for the meaning of my words, you will understand tomorrow". The dewy smile was illuminating the face of Krishna. He was smiling just that smile when he faded away from the dream of Arjuna.

Krishna now walked with slow and hesitant steps. He was a god. He could die as his brother did. He could just give up his breath by yoga. But this incarnation of his was that of a man. He had told Arjuna once that he would act in accordance with the role he was playing. He had to die like a man and not like a saint. There had to be something to cause his death. Pondering on this, Krishna lay down on the ground and went into a deep sleep.

There was a hunter in the neighbourhood. He was passing by with a bow and arrow. He looked at the sleeping form of Krishna. From a distance Krishna looked like some animal sleeping. Actually the hunter thought that it was a deer, because of the yellow silk which Krishna was wearing. The hunter took careful aim and sent the arrow. It entered the body of Krishna through the sole of his foot. The great Durvasa had granted Krishna a boon. He had granted him invulnerability all over the body except the soles of his feet. The arrow of the hunter entered the body of Krishna through the one vulnerable part of his body. Once this hunter was passing along the shore of the sea. His foot tripped against something. He stooped and saw that it was a piece of iron. He took it in his hand and saw that it would make a beautiful arrow-head. He fixed it on his arrow. The piece of iron was a portion of the iron rod which had been powdered and thrown into the sea: and it was this arrow which had entered the foot of Krishna.

Krishna suffered intense pain and called out in agony. The hunter hurried to his side. Instead of a deer, he found a man dressed in

beautiful yellow silk. He was horrified at what he had done. But Krishna smiled at him and said: "My dear man, you have done me a great favour. You have solved for me my final problem: how to die! Go in peace, my friend. You will reach the heavens for this your act". The hunter tried his best to nurse the dying man. But it was all of no avail. The great Krishna was dead. His soul ascended to the heavens, making the earth glow with its progress. Krishna had left this world. He had served the purpose for which he came, and the earth no longer had any need of him. He went back to where he came from. The world was without Krishna. It was like a body from which life had flown away. The earth was a flower which had lost its perfume.

Chapter 18

THE SEA ENTERS DWARAKA

Daruka hurried towards Hastinapura. He told them all about the great tragedy at Prabhaasa. He told them everything. Yudhish-thira, for the moment, had not remembered the curse of Gandhari. The Pandavas were numb with woe. They had suffered so much. But the thoughts of Krishna were enough to give them strength. But the was nothing. It was not possible to think. In mute agony Arjuna got into his chariot and rushed to Dwaraka. He thought of the dream he had yesterday. Krishna had said: "You will understand the mean-ing of my words tomorrow". Arjuna knew that Krishna was dead. His heart was frozen with the shock. Soon he reached Dwaraka and went to the presence of Vasudeva. He heard about the details of the tragedy that had overtaken the House of the Vrishnis.

Arjuna went to Prabhaasa. He saw that they were all dead. His beloved Satyaki was lying there, dead. He saw Pradyumna. He saw his friend Gada. He saw all of them. Vasudeva told him about the words of Krishna: that Balarama and he were going to perform penance. Arjuna went in search of these two. He came across the dead form of Balarama. Daruka led him to the spot. Arjuna had become dead to everything. Daruka and he looked for Krishna. Finally they saw him too, with his sole pierced by an arrow.

Arjuna looked long at Krishna. With the death of Krishna the earth had lost everything that was beautiful. Arjuna wanted to hurry through his task. Krishna had asked him to come soon. Krishna would be waiting for him. He had to hurry. Arjuna arranged for the

bodies of Balarama and Krishna to be taken to Dwaraka. He stood by while that dear body of his Krishna was being consumed by flames. Arjuna worked like a man possessed. He was not himself. The dreadful day was over. Arjuna spent the night with his mind set on Krishna. He thought of nothing else. In the morning he found that Vasudeva had died by going into a yogic trance and abandoning his body. Dwaraka was empty of everything that was dear to Arjuna. Several of the wives of Krishna and Balarama had ascended the funeral pyre and it was now the duty to take the citizens and the other women and children of the family of his friend to Hastinapura and take care of them. He collected all of them, and the long mournful procession began. Dwaraka was empty.

The sea, which had been beating against the shores, suddenly broke the boundary that was imposed on it by nature. The sea rushed into the city. It coursed through the streets of the beautiful city. The sea covered up everything in the city. Even as they were all looking, Arjuna saw the beautiful buildings becoming submerged one by one. Arjuna took a last look at the mansion of Krishna. It was soon covered by the sea. In a matter of a few moments it was all over. The sea had now become as placid as a lake. There was no trace of the beautiful city which had been the favourite haunt of all the Pandavas. Dwaraka was just a name: just a memory.

Arjuna went on towards Hastinapura. They would camp under the trees during the nights and resume the journey in the morning. It was the most dreadful time in the life of Arjuna. He had to keep himself occupied lest he should go mad too soon. One day, during their journey through the woods, some robbers saw this huge crowd. They wanted to attack them. They saw just one man guarding the entire party of women and children. They descended on the people of Dwaraka and tried to carry away all their wealth and their women too. Arjuna took up his Gandiva and tried to string it in a hurry. He found that he was not able to do it. He was amazed. With a great effort he finally managed to string it. But his fingers had lost their dexterity. He was feeling it so hard to use the bow and arrows. His quivers became empty. He decided to invoke some astra and despatch the robbers. But he could not remember a single incantation. He was powerless. Arjuna could do nothing. The robbers had succeeded in taking away most of the wealth and the women with them. With a broken heart, Arjuna resumed his journey with the remaining people. He reached Hastinapura and went to the presence of Yudhishthira. He stood there for a moment. Then he dropped down in a dead faint.

CHAPTER 19

YUDHISHTHIRA REACHES THE HEAVENS

The mental effort of the last few days had been too much for Arjuna. He was revived with perfumed water. Arjuna woke up from the faint. With great sobs racking his frame, he told them all about how he burnt the dead forms of Balarama, Satyaki and Krishna. He told them everything. He told them about the sea claiming the beautiful city of Dwaraka. The story of the robbers and the failing of the Gandiva to frighten a mere band of robbers was the final tragedy. The five brothers sat still. They were all thinking of the same thing. Arjuna told them about the dream when Krishna took leave of him. Their tears would not flow. Everything inside them had died the instant when they heard about the death of Krishna. There was nothing left to live for in the world. Krishna was gone. There was no meaning in living any more. They lost interest in everything.

Yudhishthira said: "Arjuna, in the Cauldron of Time we are all melted away until we lose ourselves. It is now time we melt and lose our individuality. We are now bereft of everything that was dear to us. With the death of Krishna our lives should end too". Arjuna said: "Yes, my lord. It is TIME who is the ultimate Victor". Hearing the words of Yudhishthira and Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadeva and Bheema agreed with them. The Pandavas decided to leave the earth and set out on the final journey. Yudhishthira made all the necessary arrangements. He crowned Parikshit as the king. Yuyutsu was appointed as his guardian and Kripa was his guru. The Pandavas announced to the people of the city that they had decided to renounce everything and set out towards the heavens. No one could stop them. They were firm in their resolution.

The Pandavas were ready for the great journey. Clad in tree barks and deer skin, they stood in front of the palace door taking final leave of the citizens. Draupadi, dressed in tree bark and without her jewels and silks, stood by their side. The city set up a wail of woe. The Pandavas looked the same as they did years back, when they were exiled from Hastinapura. But it was different now. A strange peace had entered their souls. Their faces were glowing with an inward light. They bade farewell to Hastinapura and went away.

They first went towards the city of Dwaraka. They saw the city submerged under water. They stood on the shores of the sea. Out of the sea their dreams seemed to speak to them: their dreams of the

long ago. While they were absorbed in the contemplation of the past, Agni appeared before them. He said: "Arjuna, you are still having the Gandiva and the quivers with you. I got them from Varuna for you. They have served their purpose. You do not need them any more. Please return them to Varuna". Arjuna's heart just broke. He took up the Gandiva and the quivers. He made a pradakshina to them and with tears in his eyes he threw them into the ocean.

The Pandavas were travelling towards the north. Soon they reached the great range of mountains: the great Himavan. They crossed that. They came to the mountain Meru. As they were proceeding, Draupadi dropped down dead. It was a dreadful happening. Bheema was dumb with the shock of it. He composed himself and asked Yudhishthira why Draupadi who was faultless should fall down dead. Yudhishthira said: "Bheema, though we were all her husbands she was more fond of Arjuna. That is the only sin she committed. But for that, she was pure. That is the reason why she could come so far". They left her there and proceeded further. Sahadeva was the next to fall. It was because he was proud of his wisdom that he had to fall, said Yudhishthira. Nakula died next. Yudhishthira told Bheema that Nakula was vain about his beauty. It was Arjuna's turn next. Bheema was told that he had to fall because he had sworn that he could kill all the enemies all by himself. He had insulted all the other great heroes by his remark. That was the reason for his death. They went some more distance. Bheema was the last to fall. He called out to Yudhishthira: "Why should I fall? What have I done, my lord?" Yudhishthira said: "My beloved Bheema, you have ever been dear to me. But the only fault I could find in you was this: you would boast about your strength. You were a great eater too. Otherwise, there is no one like you in this entire world, Bheema". Yudhishthira went on and on, alone in his pursuit of peace.

Ever since they left Hastinapura, a dog had been following the Pandavas. It went with the party till the very end. Yudhishthira's brothers were gone and their queen was gone. But this dog was still with Yudhishthira. He had reached the end of the journey. Yudhishthira saw a strange glow all around him. He saw Indra come in his chariot. Indra descended from his chariot and approached Yudhishthira. He said: "Yudhishthira, you must get into this chariot. I have brought it myself as a special mark of honour. Please come with me to the heavens". Yudhishthira did not want to go to heaven without his brothers and without Draupadi. He said: "My brothers and my beloved Draupadi set out with me on this journey. They have all fallen down. Their human bodies have been abandoned and I do not know where they have gone. Unless they all come with me I will not come

with you". Indra smiled at him and said: "My dear Yudhishthira, they have also gone to heaven. They have cast off this human body. But you have been asked to come with me. You have been granted the privilege of entering the home of the gods with your human form". Yudhishthira said: "I am honoured, my lord, by your coming. Now that you assure me that I will meet my dear ones there, I am prepared to go to heaven with you.

"Please let me bring this dog with me. It has been with me ever since I left Hastinapura. It is devoted to me. I would like to bring it along with me to heaven". Indra laughed at him and his foolish love for a dog. He said: "Yudhishthira, you have been granted immortality. You are my equal. You have been the most fortunate person in the world. Please do not lose all this because of your love for a dog. There is no place in heaven for a dog. Please abandon it and come with me". Yudhishthira shook his head. He said: "My lord, you are asking me to do something which I cannot do. This dog has shared all my troubles so far. It has been devoted to me. I cannot abandon this dog". Indra said: "You are just foolish. You have come to the threshold of heaven and yet you are affected by human feelings. I cannot take this dog in my chariot". Yudhishthira said: "All the acts of mine which have earned this heaven for me will be destroyed if I behave without compassion towards this dog. It has been my rule never to abandon one who is dependent on me. This dog is a dependant. I cannot leave it and go". Indra said: "You have abandoned all your brothers and your queen. Is this dog, then, more dear to you?" Yudhishthira said: "They were all dead. I could not revive them. I would not have left them if they had been alive. But this dog is alive. I cannot leave it. I will not enter heaven unless I am allowed to bring this dog with me. That is certain".

The dog now changed its form. It assumed the form of his father, Dharma. He said: "My son, I am proud of you. Your compassion wins my heart. Once before, in Dwaitavana when you were in the presence of your dead brothers, I tested your righteousness. You passed the test when you asked for the life of Nakula. Again, I have tested you today. You have pleased me. Go with Indra to the heavens you have earned". The place was now crowded by the denizens of heaven. They had come to see the first person who was to reach the heavens with his human body. It was never done before. Narada said: "Yudhishthira, you will now be in the company of all your ancestors. The great kings, who ruled the earth before you, are all there. You can be with them always". Yudhishthira said: "I am honoured by these words of yours, my lord". Yudhishthira ascended the great chariot of Indra.

The chariot rose up in the air and travelled in the sky. They reached the city called Amaravati. Yudhishthira was taken to the great hall. Narada showed him all the kings who were there. He said: "Look at all the kings who were your ancestors. They have perfumed the Pages of Time with their good deeds and their lasting fame. You are now one of them". Yudhishthira looked all around. His eyes scanned the entire hall. He said: "I do not see my brothers here. I do not see my queen here. I want to go where my brothers have preceded me. I do not want any other place for myself. I want to be taken to my brothers". Indra heard these words. He said: "Yudhishthira, stay here in this great hall. You have earned a place in heaven. You are the most righteous king that ever ruled the earth. It is but right that you should stay on here. Why do you still allow worldly emotions to affect you? You are not on the earth any more. You are in heaven. Cast off this foolish love for your brothers. You can stay on here. You can be happy here". Yudhishthira was hearing the words of Indra but his eyes were searching for his brothers everywhere. He could not find them anywhere.

Yudhishthira looked at Indra and said: "You are the lord of the gods and you are granting me the privilege, the great privilege, of being with you. But, my lord, I cannot stay in this place: not even for a moment. My brothers are not here. Without them heaven will be just hell for me. I am prepared to forego this great privilege that I have been granted. You must tell me the place where they are. You must take me to the place where I can find the dark Draupadi. Take me to the place where I can find my beloved Bheema and Arjuna. I want to be with my brothers Nakula and Sahadeva. I want to be with the sons of Draupadi. I do not want anything else. Please take me to them".

They were all watching him. He was startled into action. He looked at all the people, searching for his brothers, and his eyes lighted on Duryodhana!

CHAPTER 20

THE RULES OF HEAVEN

Duryodhana was in the heaven which Yudhishthira had earned with so much effort. Duryodhana was seated on a jewelled seat. He was full of splendour. He was sitting in the midst of all the kings who

had made the earth richer by their good actions. Yudhishthira was amazed. He said: "I cannot bear to see this Duryodhana here. He has been the cause of the death of so many kings of the earth. He was a very sinful man. He does not please my eyes. I will not stay in this heaven with Duryodhana as my companion. O ye gods, please take me away from here. Please take me to my brothers. I cannot stay here for even a moment more". Narada heard these words. He smiled gently at him and said: "Listen to me, Yudhishthira. I will tell you how your cousin Duryodhana came to this place. He is loved by all the kings here. He has reached heaven because he died fighting. His soul has been cleansed because he died fighting bravely. He has been harassing good men like you for years. He has been the cause of the death of so many. It is all true. But, my child, Duryodhana was true to his birth. He was a kshatriya and he died as a kshatriya should. He was never afraid. He ruled his kingdom justly. You must not judge him as a human being does. The RULES OF HEAVEN ARE DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF THE EARTH. Every sin of a kshatriya is forgiven if he dies a noble death. Again, Duryodhana died on the holy spot called Samantapanchaka. Balarama granted that he should go to heaven. Gandhari's penance is also responsible for this. You must forget your anger against Duryodhana. This is heaven, Yudhishthira. There is no place for enmity in heaven".

Yudhishthira heard all that he was told. His form was trembling with eagerness to meet his brothers. He said: "My lord, I am a stranger to heaven. I do not know the rules of heaven. I am still a human being with the feelings of a man from the earth. I am wondering about my brothers. If this sinner Duryodhana deserves this heaven, what about my dear brothers? They have never swerved from the path of truth and duty. They are great heroes. They are great men. I want to see which place has been assigned to them. I want to see my elder brother, Radheya. I am so eager to see Satyaki and Dhrishtadyumna. I want to see all my friends who died for me. I want to see my child Abhimanyu. I want to see my friend Krishna. Please take me to them". Yudhishthira's voice was a wail of agony now. His impatience was pathetic. He could not speak anything else. He wanted to be taken to his brothers. Again he spoke. He said: "There were so many kings who died for me. I do not see them here. Radheya must be here. I do not see him here. Where is Abhimanyu? I do not understand the rules of heaven. I will be happy only if I am in the company of my brothers".

The attendants of Indra were there. Indra said: "If you are bent on meeting them I will send you to them. My attendants will take you there. They will do anything you wish". The attendants led the way,

and Yudhishthira followed. The path was very long. Gradually the glow and beauty that were found near heaven were being lost. It was now dimly lit and dark. Later it was completely dark where they were going. The atmosphere was full of poisonous smells. It was intolerable. The place looked like another Kurukshetra. Dead forms and worms and horrible things were to be found everywhere. Yudhishthira said: "Why, this place is dreadful! Where can I find my brothers? Where is the spot?" They said not a word. Yudhishthira said: "To which god does this part of heaven belong? I want to know". The attendant said: "My lord, this is the road that leads you to your brothers. We have been asked to take you as far as you are able to go. If you find this place unbearable, you can retrace your steps". It was not possible for Yudhishthira to stand there. The air was so poisonous. He stood for a moment and decided to return. He was about to turn back. He heard voices speaking to him. The voices said: "Yudhishthira, please do not go back. Please do not go away. Please stand where you are. Your coming has relieved us of our sufferings. You are righteous. Your presence is soothing to us in our agony. Please do not go away". Yudhishthira thought that the voices were familiar. He said: "Who are you that call out to me for help?" The voices said: "I am Radheya", "I am Bheema". Yudhishthira heard the voices of all his brothers and Draupadi and Dhrishtadyumna. Yudhishthira was amazed at this. His anger was now beyond all control. He said: "Why are they all here? They have been sinless. I cannot understand the rules of heaven. A man like that sinful Duryodhana is in heaven, glowing like a second Indra, and my brothers and Draupadi and all those who are dear to me are in hell. Am I awake or am I asleep? Is this a nightmare?" Yudhishthira turned to the attendants of Indra and said: "I have heard the voices of my brothers. You can all go back to your master and tell him that Yudhishthira has found his heaven".

An hour passed thus. Then came to Yudhishthira Indra and all the other gods of heaven. When they came the place took on a different appearance. The darkness lifted and the place lost its dreadful appearance. The air was now sweet and pure and it was all mysterious to Yudhishthira. Indra spoke to him. He smiled and said: "The heavenly host is pleased with you, Yudhishthira. You have earned the heavens today. Your love for your brothers is wonderful. It is the rule that hell must be passed by every king. You had to pass through this hell for that reason. Also because of that one lie you spoke when Drona was killed. You are now free from all sin. You say that you cannot understand the rules of heaven. I will tell you.

"A man whose sins are greater than his good actions reaches heaven

first. After the time of his stay in heaven expires, he goes to hell. But, for a man whose good actions exceed his sins hell is his first dwelling place. Then he reaches heaven. Your sins have been few. In fact, only one sin is ascribed to you: that one lie. As for your brothers, you have yourself told Bheema what sins they have committed. For that they had to stay in hell for the period of a few hours. They are all cleansed of their sins. Dhrishtadyumna was also made to stay in hell for just a few hours. They are all now in heaven. Come with me. This was all just an illusion. Your brothers are not here. Come with me. I will show them to you".

Dharma came there. He said: "This is the third and final test. You have proved that you are the image of me. I was responsible for all this experience of yours. Come now, and see all of them in heaven". They took Yudhishthira to the river Ganga which flowed in heaven. He bathed in it. He was able to cast away his human feelings and his body was now divine. In a happy frame of mind Yudhishthira went to heaven with the gods. They entered the great hall of Indra.

Krishna sat there in the midst of all the gods. By his side, smiling at Yudhishthira, sat Arjuna. They rose up and came to the side of Yudhishthira and welcomed him. With them he saw Radheya, his dear brother. He was with the twelve suns. Yudhishthira saw Bheema surrounded by the Maruts. Nakula and Sahadeva were with the heavenly twins, the Aswinis. They all came to him and welcomed him to heaven. Draupadi was there, glowing like a big flame. She was surrounded by her sons. Satyaki and all the heroes of the Vrishni House were there. Abhimanyu was there by the side of the cool and charming Moon. Dhrishtadyumna was found by the side of Agni. Bheeshma was seen with the Vasus and Drona was by the side of Brihaspati. Duryodhana's sins were all redeemed and he had attained the heavens. He was not doomed to hell. Vidura was seen in the company of Dharma, and they came to Yudhishthira to take him with them.

EPILOGUE

Krishna, the incarnation of the Lord, had asked the gods to be born in the world of men to help Him in His work: the destruction of Evil and the establishment of Dharma. Indra, Vayu, Dharma and the Aswini twins were on the earth for a time. The earth was to be cleansed of the poisons which were choking her. The earth was made pure because these gods had walked on it. The seed of Dharma had been planted in the soil which was prepared by the blood of the noblest of men. The purpose of their birth had been served. They had to return to heaven once more. The Pandavas were absorbed into the gods who were their fathers. The world is richer for the few years of glory that was hers when Krishna walked on it. The story of the lives of the Pandavas has become immortal. So long as the world lives, so long as the sun and the moon move in their orbits, so long as there is a spark of goodness in the heart of man, the story of the Pandavas will be read in the world of men.

GLOSSARY

ABHIMANYU	The son of Arjuna and Subhadra.
ACHARYA	A preceptor: guru.
ADHARMA	Unrighteousness.
ADITYA	One of the names of the Sun. It is said that at the time of the Great Deluge there will be twelve Adityas glowing all together.
AGNEYASTRA	The astra presided over by Agni.
AGNI	The God of Fire.
AINDRASTRA	The astra presided over by Indra.
AIRAVATA	The white elephant belonging to Indra.
AJATASATRU	One of the names by which Yudhishthira was called.
AJNAATAVAASA	Living incognito. The thirteenth year of the exile of the Pandavas had to be spent in hiding.
AKSHAHRIDAYA	The secret of the game of dice.
AKSHAUHINI	An army division consisting of 21870 chariots, 21870 elephants, 65610 horses and 109350 footmen.
ALAMBUSA	A rakshasa who fought for Duryodhana in the war.
AMARAVATI	The city of Indra.
AMBA	The eldest princess of the kingdom of Kasi.
AMBAALIKA, AMBIKA	The younger princesses of Kasi. They were the wives of Vichitraveerya.
AMRITA	Nectar, the food of the gods.
ANANTAVIJAYA	The conch of Yudhishthira.
ANDHAKA	One of the clans which made up the Yadava tribe. The tribes were the descendants of Yadu, Turvasu, Druhyu and Anu, the sons of Yayati. The Yadava tribe was made up of Vrishnis, Andhakas and Bhojas.
ANGA	The kingdom over which Radheya was ruling.
APADDHARMA	A desperate remedy for a desperate situation.
APSARA	Celestial dancer.
ARANI	A piece of wood from the Sami tree. Two pieces of wood are rubbed together to produce fire, specially the sacrificial fire.
ARDHARATHIKA	A military title which is inferior to the highest title, MAHARATHIKA.
ARGHYA	Water offered to a guest for washing his hands. This is the literal meaning. It is said to be a mark

	of honour if, among many guests, one is chosen to be the first to receive Arghya.
ARJUNA	The third of the Pandavas. He was the son of Indra and Kunti. He was so named because he was considered faultless.
ASHRAMA	A hermitage: a refuge for those who have abandoned the material world.
ASTRA	A missile used in warfare. The missile is endowed with divine powers. An astra is said to be presided over by a particular god and he, when invoked, enters the astra.
ASURA	The confirmed enemy of the Devas. Devas are called Suras as against their enemies who are Asuras. Many a war has been fought in the high heavens between the Suras and the Asuras.
ASVAMEDHA	The famed horse sacrifice. A king who performed the Asvamedha is the acclaimed suzerain of the world. A horse is sent to all the kingdoms as a challenge. Any king who is brave enough to defy the king can take the horse and keep it bound. The challenger will have to fight with him and prove his superiority.
ASVASENA	A snake, the son of Takshaka, the serpent. Asvasena was one of the few who escaped from the great fire in the Khandava forest.
ASWATTHA	The peepul tree. It is said that at the time of the Great Deluge the Lord will take the form of a child which will be sleeping on an ASWATTHA leaf.
ASWATTHAMA	The son of Drona. He was an immortal.
ASWINI	The celestial twins who were the presiding gods of medicine.
ATIRATHA	A chariot-driver in the court of Dhritarashtra. Radheya was his adopted son.
AVARTAKA	One of the favourite clouds of Indra, the other being Pushkala. These two are the kings of all rain-bearing clouds and, when Indra wants to rain plenty on the earth, he summons these clouds.
BAAHLIKA	The brother of Santanu. He was the oldest fighter in the great war.
BABHRUVAHANA	The son of Arjuna and Chitrangi.
BADARI	An ashram in the Himalaya where the great sages Nara and Narayana were supposed to have performed intense tapas.

BADAVA	A great devouring fire which is said to be concealed in the heart of the ocean.
BAKA	An Asura who was killed by Bheema in Ekachakra-nagara.
BALARAMA	The son of Vasudeva and Rohini. He was the elder brother of Krishna.
BEEBHATSU	One of the names of Arjuna. It means 'Striking terror into the hearts of the enemies'. Arjuna would never act in a detestable manner.
BHAGADATTA	A great veteran who fought in the great war for Duryodhana. He was a friend of Indra and he was invincible so long as he had the Vaishnavastra.
BHAGAVAN	Actually it means the Lord. But usually it is used as a term of respect for an honoured person.
BHAKTA	A devotee.
BHAKTI	Devotion.
BHARADWAJA	A great brahmin. He was the father of Drona.
BHARATA-VARSHA	The name of India which has come down from ancient times. The name comes from Bharata, one of the kings of the lunar race who ruled over Arya-varta.
BHARGAVA	The name of Parasurama, the guru of Bheeshma. Drona and Radheya.
BHARGAVASTRA	The astra presided over by Bhargava.
BHEDA	One of the four ways of persuasion, Sama, Dana, Bheda and Danda. Bheda is trying to teach one to be better by comparing that person with one who is superior. Sama is using gentle words. Dana is trying to win him over with gifts. Danda is the method of chastising and has to be adopted when the other three fail to have any effect.
BHEEMASENA	The second of the Pandavas better known as BHEEMA. He was the son of Kunti and Vayu, the lord of the Maruts.
BHEESHMA	The son of Santanu and Ganga. His other names were Gangeya and Devavrata. When he renounced the kingdom and worldly pleasures also, for the sake of his father, he was given the name BHEESHMA which means 'terrible'.
BHIKSHA	What is collected as alms.
BHOOMINJAYA	Otherwise known as Uttarakumara, the son of Virata.

BHOORISRAVAS	One of the heroes who died on the battle-field of Kurukshetra.
BINDUSARAS	The lake formed by the drops of the Ganga which descended from the matted locks of Lord Sankara.
BRAHMA	The Creator. One of the great Trinity.
BRAHMACHARI	One who walks in the path of the Brahman: that is, in quest of knowledge. A brahmachari is a student who is still unmarried.
BRAHMA-CHARYA	The stage when one is still a student. More than that, it means strict celibacy.
BRAHMA-SEERSHA	The most powerful of all the astras taught to Arjuna by Drona. It was said to be the destroyer of the world and so was not meant to be used on the earth.
BRAHMASTRA	The astra presided over by Brahma.
BRAHMIN	Society is divided into four castes: brahmin, kshatriya, vaisya and sudra. The brahmin is said to belong to the highest caste since he is said to study the VEDAS and philosophy. He is supposed to transcend material aspirations.
BRIHADASVA	A great rishi who was a source of comfort to Yudhishthira during his twelve years' exile.
BRIHANNALA	The name taken up by Arjuna when he lived in the court of Virata as a dancer.
BRIHASPATI	The guru of the Devas.
BRINDAVANA	The place where Krishna spent his boyhood.
BUDHA	The planet Mercury. He is said to be the son of the Moon.
CHAKRA	The discus. One of the weapons of Vishnu.
CHAKRAVYUHA	The circular formation of the army which Drona arranged during his commandership.
CHANDRA	The Moon.
CHITRANGADA	The elder son of Santanu and Satyavati.
CHITRANGI	The princess of Manalur who became the wife of Arjuna.
CHITRASENA	A Gandharva king who fought with Arjuna and was defeated. Later he kidnapped Duryodhana and his women during the final year of the exile of the Pandavas. The name was borne by one of the brothers of Duryodhana also.
DAITYA	One of the names by which Asuras are mentioned. They were so called because they were the sons of Diti.

DAKSHINA-YANA	The half of the year when the sun travels southwards along the ecliptic. There are two halfs of the year: the Uttarayana and Dakshinayana. It is said that one who dies during Dakshinayana will be born again into this world of sin, while one dying during Uttarayana is saved from rebirth.
DAMAGHOSHA	The husband of the sister of Vasudeva and father of Sisupala.
DAMAGRANTHI	The name taken by Nakula during his stay in Virata.
DAMBODBHAVA	An Asura whom Nara killed. He was born again as Radheya to be killed again by Nara who was reborn as Arjuna.
DARUKA	The charioteer of Krishna.
DEVADATTA	The conch of Arjuna.
DEVAKI	The wife of Vasudeva and mother of Krishna.
DEVAVRATA	The name of Ganga's son. He was later known as Bheeshma (see Bheeshma).
DHANANJAYA	One of the names of Arjuna. He was given the name because of the immense wealth he brought with him during the campaign of victory preceding the Rajasuya yaga.
DHARMA	Righteousness. Also the name of Yama the God of Righteousness.
DHARMASHAS-TRA	The code of ethics which set down the rules of conduct.
DHAUMYA	The kulaguru of the Pandavas.
DHRISHTA-DYUMNA	The son of Drupada and the brother of Draupadi.
DHRITARASH-TRA	The son of Ambika. He was lord of Hastinapura.
DRAUPADI	The daughter of Drupada. She was born of fire. She was the wife of the Pandavas.
DRONA	The son of Bharadwaja. He was the preceptor of the Pandavas and the Kauravas in the art of fighting.
DRUPADA	The king of Panchala. His capital was Kampilya.
DURMARSHANA, DURMUKHA	Brothers of Duryodhana.
DURVASA	A sage famed for his anger. He granted to Kunti the boon by which she could invoke any god whom she pleased.

DURYODHANA	The eldest son of Dhritarashtra.
DUSSALA	The only sister of Duryodhana. She was the wife of Jayadratha.
DUSSASANA	A brother of Duryodhana.
DWAITAVANA	The forest where the Pandavas spent a large part of their exile of twelve years.
DWAPARA	Time is said to be divided into four quarters called yugas: Krita, Treta, Dwapara and Kali. Dharma, it is said, walks firmly on all four legs during the Krita yuga. In Treta one leg is maimed and in Dwapara two of its legs are disabled. During Kali yuga Dharma is said to limp on just one leg.
DWARAKA	The city where the Vrishnis lived.
DWEEPA	Island.
EKACHAKRA	The city where the Pandavas found refuge during the time immediately after they escaped from the house of lac.
EKALAVYA	A nishada boy whom Drona refused to take as his pupil. Ekalavya, however, made an image of his guru out of mud and learnt archery from it.
GAANDHARVA	A marriage where the 'eye meets eye and the marriage is performed'. This marriage without rites or rituals was allowed only to kshatriyas. All the great romances in Sanskrit literature are based on the Gaandharva marriage.
GADA	One of Krishna's cousins. Also, the mace. The favourite weapon of Balarama, Bheema and Duryodhana.
GADAYUDDHA	A duel with the mace. But usually when the word is used it is understood to mean the duel with the mace fought between Bheema and Duryodhana.
GANDHAMADANA	A peak in the Himalaya. It gets the name because of the intoxicating perfume which prevails all the time around the peak.
GANDHARA	The country which was the home of Gandhari.
GANDHARI	The princess of Gandhara, the wife of Dhritarashtra and the mother of Duryodhana. She had tied up her eyes with a piece of silk since she did not want to look at the world which her husband could not see.

GANDHARVA	A celestial musician and dancer.
GANDIVA	The divine bow belonging to Varuna which Agni obtained for Arjuna.
GANGA	The celestial river which was later brought to the earth. She was the wife of Santanu and the mother of Bheeshma.
GANGEYA	The name of Bheeshma, being born of the Ganga.
GARUDA	The sacred eagle which is the vehicle of Vishnu. It is an eagle with a white neck and brown, golden-brown body and feathers. It is slightly smaller than a kite.
GAUTAMA	The father of Kripa and Kripi.
GHATOTKACHA	The son of Bheema and Hidimbi.
GOKULA	The colony of cowherds where Krishna spent his boyhood.
GOPI	A milkmaid of Gokula.
GURU	Acharya, preceptor, teacher or spiritual guide.
GURUDAKSHINA	Reward paid to the guru by the student at the end of his education. The guru has the privilege of asking for anything and it is the duty of the student to fulfil his desire.
HANUMAN	Anjaneya who was famed in the Ramayana. He was the son of Vayu.
HARISCHANDRA	One of the kings of the Ikshvaku race. He was famed for his adherence to truth.
HASTINAPURA	The capital of the Kuru kings. There was a king called Hasti and the city was built during his time and was called after him.
HIDIMBA	A rakshasa who lived in the forest called after him. He was killed by Bheema.
HIDIMBI	The sister of Hidimba. She became the wife of Bheema and begot Ghatotkacha.
HIMAVAN	The name of the mountain Himalaya.
HIRANVATI	The river along whose banks was placed the Pandava army during the great war.
HIRANYADHANUS	The nishada king, the father of Ekalavya.
HOTRAVAHANA	The grandfather of Amba and a good friend of Parasurama.
IKSHVAKU	A great king of the Solar race.

INDRA	The Lord of the heavenly host. He was the lord of the East.
INDRAKILA	A peak of the Himalayas where Arjuna performed his penance to Sankara to obtain the Pasupatastra.
INDRALOKA	Heaven, the kingdom of Indra.
INDRAPRASTHA	The city where the Pandavas ruled. So called because of Indra who got the city built for the Pandavas.
IRAVAN	A son of Arjuna. His mother was Chitrangi.
ISHTADAIVA	A chosen god.
JAMBU	The name of India is Jambudweepa in classical phraseology.
JARASANDHA	A great devotee of Sankara. He was the king of Magadha and was killed by Bheema.
JAYANTA	A city very near Hastinapura, where Dhritarashtra had a palace built. The game of dice was played there.
JISHNU	One of the names of Arjuna. It means that he was fearless.
KADAMBA	A beautiful flower with stamens coloured green, brown and dark red. This is a flower typical of the monsoon. When the dark rain clouds gather in the sky and there is thunder, the flower thrills into life.
KAILASA	The peak in the Himalayas which is said to be the abode of Lord Sankara.
KALAKUTA	A deadly poison supposed to be extracted from snake venom.
KALI	One of the names of Satyavati who was also called Matsyagandhi, Yojanagandhi, Gandhavati and Vasavi.
KALI YUGA	The fourth quarter of time (see Dwapara).
KAMA	The God of Love.
KAMPILYA	The capital city of Panchala ruled by Drupada. Draupadi's swayamvara was held here.
KAMSA	The king of Mathura who was killed by Krishna.
KAMYAKA	A forest in which the Pandavas spent a large part of their twelve years' exile.
KANINKA	The evil mentor of Dhritarashtra.
KANKA	The name taken up by Yudhishthira during his stay in the court of Virata.

KAPIDHWAJA — Arjuna is called by this name since his chariot had the monkey as a banner.

KARNA — One of the names of Radheya. He was given this name by Indra when he gave away his earrings to Indra.

KARTIKEYA — One of the names of Lord Subrahmanya the son of Sankara.

KASHAYA — When a person has renounced the world and its pleasures he is supposed to wear clothes that are orange or dun-coloured. These clothes go by the name Kashaya.

KAUMODAKI — The mace of Lord Vishnu.

KAUNTEYA — The name of a son of Kunti.

KAURAVA — A descendant of Kuru, one of the renowned kings of the Lunar race.

KAUSTUBHA — A jewel worn by Lord Vishnu.

KAVACHA — Armour.

KEECHAKA — The commander of the Virata army. He was the brother of the queen Sudeshna.

KHANDAVA — The great forest which was burnt by Agni with the help of Arjuna and Krishna.

KHANDAVA-PRASTHA — The half of the Kuru kingdom which was given to Yudhishthira as his share. This was later known as Indraprastha after Indra renewed it.

KIRITI — Another name of Arjuna. He was so called because of the jewelled crown given to him by Indra, his father, when he was in Indraloka.

KODANDA — The famed bow of Sree Rama.

KOVIDARA — It is a beautiful flower purple in colour, also mauve and white. The banner of Abhimanyu was the Kovidara.

KRAUNCHA — The name of a bird. Incidentally, the Krauncha formation was the favourite of the commanders of the armies when the war was fought.

KRIPA — The son of Gautama. He was the guru of the young princes in Hastinapura.

KRIPI — The twin sister of Kripa. She was the wife of Drona and the mother of Aswatthama.

KRISHNA — The son of Vasudeva and Devaki.

KRISHNAA — The name of Draupadi.

KRISHNA-PAKSHA — The dark fortnight when the moon is on the wane.

KRITAVARMA	A cousin of Krishna who fought for Duryodhana in the war.
KRITA YUGA	The first quarter of Time (see Dwapara).
KSHATRIYA	The second class of men in the division of society. They were fighters and the kings were mostly Kshatriyas (see Brahmin).
KUBERA	The god of wealth. He is said to be the Lord of the North.
KULAGURU	The family priest. Every royal family had a kulaguru. He held a high position in the court.
KUMARA	One of the names of Lord Kartikeya, the son of Sankara.
KUNDALA	Earring.
KUNTI	The daughter of Soora, the sister of Vasudeva and the adopted daughter of Kunti Bhoja which is why she is called Kunti. She was the wife of Pandu and the mother of the Pandavas.
KUNTI BHOJA	The adopted father of Kunti.
KURAVAKA	Smallish pink, white, mauve and purple flowers typical of Spring. They appear in shrubs at the fag end of Winter and the first few days of Spring.
KURU	One of the reputed kings of the Lunar race.
KURUKSHETRA	The land adjoining Samantapanchaka, where the great battle was fought.
KUSA GRASS	One particular kind of grass which is used for all religious purposes and also during the performance of funeral rites. The grass has been so sanctified because tradition has it that the bowl of Amrita from the heavens rested on this grass for a few moments.
MAADRI	The wife of Pandu and the mother of Nakula and Sahadeva.
MAHABHISHAK	A king who was born on the earth as Santanu.
MAHARATHIKA	The highest title that can be bestowed on a Kshatriya warrior for his military prowess. He has, at his command, one Akshauhini (see Akshauhini).
MAHARUDRA	The hymns sung in praise of Rudra or Sankara.
MAKARA VYUHA	The arrangement of the army in the shape of a crocodile.
MANIPUSHPAKA	The conch of Sahadeva.

MANMATHA	The God of Love: also known as Kama.
MANTRA	Any incantation.
MARKANDEYA	A great rishi. He had been blessed by Lord Sankara to be always sixteen years old. He helped Yudhishthira spend many happy days in the forest by relating to him many instructive and interesting stories.
MARUTS	They are seven in number and they dwell in the caves of the mountains. They are the life and breath of the world. Vayu is the lord of the Maruts.
MATHURA	The holy city where Krishna was born.
MATSYA YANTRA	The fish which was the target to be hit by an archer during the swayamvara of Draupadi.
MAYA	(1) Illusion. Maya tactics were adopted by the rakshasas during the war. (2) An architect who managed to escape from the Khandava fire. He built the Sabha for Yudhishthira.
MAYASABHA	The great hall built for Yudhishthira by Maya.
MITHILA	The city where Seeta, the wife of Sree Rama, was born.
MLECCHABHASHA	The dialect spoken by Mlecchas.
MLECCHAS	Supposed to be the descendants of ANU, the fourth son of Yayati, a king of the Lunar race. They did not have a kingdom of their own.
NAGA	Belonging to the serpent clan.
NAGALOKA	The land buried under the sea where the serpent king Vasuki is said to rule.
NAGASTRA	An astra presided over by a serpent.
NAHUSHA	One of the famed kings of the Lunar race. He was the father of Yayati.
NAKULA	The fourth Pandava. He was the son of Maadri and one of the Aswini twins.
NARA	A great sage who, with Narayana, performed great penance in Badari Asrama. Arjuna was Nara born again into the world.
NARADA	A rishi, the son of Brahma and Saraswati, the goddess of learning.

NARAYANA	A great sage (see Nara). Krishna was the incarnation of Narayana.
NARAYANASTRA	The astra presided over by Lord Vishnu.
PADMAVYUHA	The army arranged in the form of a full-blown lotus.
PANCHAJANYA	The renowned conch of Krishna.
PANCHALA	The kingdom ruled by Drupada.
PANDAVA	A son of Pandu.
PANDU	The son of Ambaalika.
PARASARA	The father of Vyasa.
PARIKSHIT	The posthumous child of Abhimanyu.
PARJANYA	One of the names of Indra. Indra is the giver of rain and so the giver of life.
PARTHA	A son of Pritha whose other name is Kunti. Yudhishthira, Bheema and Arjuna are all Parthas. But by Partha is usually meant Arjuna.
PARTHASARATHI	One of the names of Krishna, because he drove the chariot of Arjuna during the war.
PASUPATA	The astra presided over by Pasupati, that is, Lord Sankara.
PAUNDRA	The conch of Bheema.
PAURAVA	Pururavas, one of the early kings of the Lunar race, gave his name to his descendants and the throne of the kings of the Lunar race is usually referred to as the "Paurava throne".
PAYASA	A preparation of which milk and rice are the ingredients. No festival can be celebrated without preparing Payasa.
PHALGUNA	One of the names of Arjuna. He was called so because he was born when the star Uttara Phalguna was in the ascent.
PRABHASA	A city very near Dwaraka. It was a favourite picnic spot of the Vrishnis, and was made holy by the passing away of Krishna.
PRADAKSHINA	Circumambulation. This is done to elders to show respect to them.
PRADYUMNA	The son of Krishna and Rukmini.
PRAMANAVATA	The resting place of the Pandavas on the first night after their exile from Hastinapura.
PRATEEPA	The father of Santanu.
PRITHA	The original name of Kunti: hence her son is a Partha.

PRITHIVI	A name of Mother Earth. She was the mother of Naraka, an asura.
PUJA	Worship with flowers and other offerings.
PUNYA	The accumulated result of one's good actions.
PURURAVAS	See Pauravas.
PUSHKALA	The favourite rain cloud of Indra (see Avartaka).
PUTRAKAMA	A yaga, a kind of penance where the prayer is for the birth of a child.
RADHA	(1) The beloved of Krishna when he was in Gokula. (2) The wife of Atiratha and the foster-mother of Radheya.
RADHEYA	The son of Kunti and Surya the Sun-god. He was brought up by Atiratha and Radha.
RAHU	One of the nine grahas. When the Sun and Moon are under eclipse they are said to have been swallowed by Rahu.
RAIVATAKA	A favourite spot of the Vrishnis. It is said to be the Girnar Hill in Junagadh.
RAJASUYA	A yaga which, when performed, assures a king of his sovereignty of the world and a place in the heavens. It is the ultimate ambition of every king to perform the Rajasuya and the Aswamedha yagas (see Asvamedha).
RAKSHASA	Being endowed with inhuman strength and capacity to do anything. Usually his mental make up is such that he prefers evil to good.
RATI	The wife of Kama: the Goddess of Love.
REVATI	The wife of Balarama.
RISHABHA NOTE	The second of the seven notes which form the musical scale.
RISHI	One who has renounced the world and lives as an ascetic. But he is more than just an ascetic. A rishi has performed so many penances and is such a spiritual giant that the gods consider a rishi their equal or even more. They are the seers of the world.
ROHINI	The mother of Balarama.
RUḌRA	The name of Sankara. The soft, gentle, benign aspect of Siva is described by the names Siva and

	Sankara, while the name Rudra is used when we think of the wild, angry, fearful aspect of the Lord.
RUKMI	The king of Bhojakata. His sister was Rukmini, the wife of Krishna.
RUKMINI	The wife of Krishna.
SAAMA	The method of persuasion by gentle words (see Bheda).
SABHA	A great hall: a council hall. It is also used in the sense of a council meeting.
SACHI	The wife of Indra.
SADHU	An ascetic.
SAHADEVA	The fifth of the Pandavas. He was the son of Maadri and one of the Asvini twins.
SAIRANDHRI	The name of Draupadi when she was in the city of Virata.
SAKTI	In the context it means the powerful weapon given by Indra to Radheya in return for the Kavacha and Kundala.
SAKUNI	The brother of Gandhari and the uncle of Duryodhana.
SALYA	The king of Madra. He was the brother of Maadri.
SAMANTAPANCHAKA	The sacred spot where the gadayuddha was fought between Bheema and Duryodhana.
SAMI	A tall tree with dense branches. The wood of this tree is used for making sacrificial fire (see Arani).
SAMSAPTAKA	The Trigarta clan and their followers.
SANJAYA	The charioteer of Dhritarashtra.
SANKARA	(See Rudra.)
SANTANU	A king of the Lunar race. He was the father of Bheeshma.
SATYABHAMA	A wife of Krishna.
SATYAKI	One of the Vrishnis. He was the grandson of Sini and the son of Satyaka.
SATYAVATI	The wife of Santanu and the mother of Chitrangada and Vichitraveerya. She was also called by other names (see Kali).
SAVYASACHI	One of the names of Arjuna. He was called so because he could use both his hands when he shot arrows from his bow.
SESHA	The great snake called Adisesha which is said to be the bed of Vishnu. It is also said to bear the world on its thousand hoods.

SHANMUKHA — One of the names of Kartikeya the son of Sankara.

SHARNGA — The bow of Krishna.

SIKHANDI — Amba born to the king Drupada.

SINI — The grandfather of Satyaki. He was the cousin of Soora who was the father of Vasudeva.

SISUPALA — The king of the Chedis. He was killed by Krishna during the Rajasuya yaga.

SIVAM — The name of the house of lac built for the Pandavas in Varanavata. The grimness of the humour in calling the house 'SIVAM' lies in the fact that the word means 'Good, pure'. In short, it stands for all that is pure and holy and good.

SNATAKA — A person who has finished his education in the gurukula but has not yet entered the next ashrama, Grihasthashrama or the married state.

SOMA — (1) The Moon.
(2) The intoxicating juice of the Soma plant.

SUBHADRA — The sister of Krishna, the wife of Arjuna and the mother of Abhimanyu.

SUCHIMUKHA VYUHA — One of the arrangements of the army. It is a difficult and rare arrangement. The vyuha tapers into a needle point where there is maximum protection.

SUDARSANA — (1) The discus, a weapon of Vishnu.
(2) One of the brothers of Duryodhana. He was the last of the brothers to be killed before the killing of Duryodhana in the Gadayuddha.

SUDHARMA — The court of Indra.

SUDRA — The fourth class of people in society (see Brahmin).

SUGHOSHA — The conch of Nakula.

SUKA — The son of Vyasa.

SUKRA — The preceptor of the Asuras.

SUMANTRA — The charioteer of Dasaratha, the father of Sree Rama.

SUPRITIKA — The magnificent elephant of Bhagadatta which caused havoc in the Pandava army during the war.

SURYA — The name of the Sun god.

SUSARMA — The eldest of the Trigarta brothers.

SUTA — A charioteer. Usually the suta is an attendant of the king. He is his personal 'valet' and also the charioteer. At times the suta happens to be the confidant of the king as in the case of Sanjaya. A suta is the son of a kshatriya and a brahmin woman.

SUTAPUTRA	The son of a charioteer. The name which was part of Radheya.
SWAHA	The wife of Agni, the God of Fire.
SWAYAMVARA	In the days of the Aryans the princesses were allowed to choose their husbands. There would be an impressive gathering of all the princes who were suitors to the hand of the princess and this was called a swayamvara, choosing a husband.
TAKSHAKA	One of the dreadful serpents. He was the brother of Adi Shesha and Vasuki.
TANTRIPALA	The name taken by Sahadeva during his stay in the court of Virata.
TAPAS	Penance.
TIRTHAYATRA	A pilgrimage to all the holy waters of India. This pilgrimage is said to cleanse a person of all the sins he has committed. Every religious-minded person has hopes of touring the entire Bharatavarsha on pilgrimage.
TRIGARTA	The country which Arjuna conquered during his campaign for the Rajasuya of Yudhishthira. The Trigarta brothers were five in number: Susarma, Satyaratha, Satyavarma, Satyaashu and Satya-dharma.
TRIVENI SANGAMA	The spot where Ganga and Yamuna blend and where the river Saraswati is said to flow unseen to form the sangama of the three rivers: Triveni.
VAIKARTANA	The name given to Radheya when he cut away the armour from his body.
VAISYA	The third class of people in society (see Brahmin).
VAJRA	The thunderbolt of Indra.
VALALA	The name taken by Bheema in the court of Virata.
VARANAVATA	The city where the Pandavas were made to live in a house of lac.
VARUNA	The Lord of the Sea and of the West.
VARUNASTRA	The astra presided over by Varuna.
VASANTA	Spring: said to be the inevitable companion of Kama the God of Love.
VASISHTHA	The kulaguru of Dasaratha, Rama's father.
VASUDEVA	The son of Soora and the father of Krishna, Balarama and Subhadra.
VASUKI	The king of the underworld of serpents.

VASUSHENA	Another name of Radheya.
VAYAVYASTRA	The astra presided over by Vayu.
VAYU	The Lord of the Maruts and the father of Bheema.
VICHITRA-VEERYA	One of the two sons of Santanu and Satyavati, the other being Chitrangada.
VIDURA	The brother of Dhritarashtra and Pandu.
VIJAYA	(1) One of the names of Arjuna. He was called so because he was always victorious. (2) Radheya's bow which was given to him by Parasurama.
VIRATA	The capital of the Matsya country.
VISWAKARMA	The architect of the gods.
VISWAROOPA	The form of the Lord in its entire Glory.
VIVIMSATI	One of the brothers of Duryodhana.
VRIKAPRASTHA	The halting place of the Pandavas on the first day of their twelve years' exile.
VRIKODARA	One of the names of Bheema.
VRISHASENA	One of the sons of Radheya.
VRISHNI	The clan to which Krishna belonged.
VYUHA	The arrangement of the army in some particular form.
YADAVAS	The descendants of Yadu the eldest son of Yayati.
YAGA	A sacrifice with some particular aim in view: for instance, Putrakama is for getting a son; Sarpa yaga, for the destruction of snakes, and so on.
YAJA	Yaja and Upayaja were the rishis who helped Drupada to perform the Putrakama yajna as a result of which Draupadi and Dhrishtadyumna were born.
YAJNA	A synonym of Yaga.
YAKSHA	The name given to the demi-gods. In the context it was the form taken up by the Lord of Dharma to test Yudhishthira.
YAMA	The Lord of Righteousness, of Death. He is the lord of the South and he was the father of Yudhishthira.
YAMUNA	The river which has been immortalised because of Krishna spending his boyhood on her banks. Yamuna is a tributary of Ganga.
YASODA	The wife of Nanda and the foster-mother of Krishna.

YAVANAS	The descendants of Turvasu, the second son of Yayati.
YATI	An ascetic.
YAYATI	The son of Nahusha. He was one of the great kings of the lunar race. Because his other sons disobeyed him, Yayati crowned his youngest son Puru as the king. Yadu, the eldest son, was the founder of the Yadavas; Turvasu, the second, was the founder of the Yavanas. Druhyu, the third, was the founder of the Bhojas; and Anu, the fourth, was the founder of the Mlecchas.
YOGA	It is not an easy word to define since it comprises an infinite number and range of meanings. But generally, yoga means a trance: a spiritual withdrawal from the world around and trying to attune oneself with the Infinite.
YOJANA	A distance roughly between eight and nine miles.
YUDHISHTHIRA	The eldest of the Pandavas. He was the son of Kunti and Yama the Lord of Dharma.
YUVARAJA	The heir-apparent.
YUYUDHANA	The name of Satyaki, the cousin of Krishna.
YUYUTSU	The son born to Dhritarashtra by a Sudra woman. He was the only survivor of the sons of Dhritarashtra since he joined Yudhishthira just before the war began. He was made the guardian of young Parikshit before the Pandavas set out on the last journey, the Mahaprasthana.

great epic, Smt. Kamala captures with dramatic intensity the movement of the story. As the episodes unfold in Smt. Kamala's vivid narrative, one seems to hear Draupadi's wail of distress, Duryodhana's arrogant laughter, and even the twang of Arjuna's bow, the *Gandiva*.

The *Mahabharata*, now in its 6th edition, won for Smt. Kamala a great reputation. She followed this up with condensations of *Srimad Bhagavatam* and Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Here is a trilogy of more than 2000 pages — a stupendous literary achievement.

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The gifted author passed away o February 21, 1983.

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—from the *Foreword* by
Dr. K. M. MUNSHI